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THE PARSON'S BOY:

OR,

The Innocent One of the Family.

By TOM TEASER.



The clothes gave him a certain clerical appearance, but the fit made him look as funny as a circus clown. "How yo' like dat, boss?" he asked, after waiting for the parson to say something. "What do you mean by masquerading in my best clothes how dare you take such liberties?" cried the good minister, jumping up and getting quite excited.

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THE PARSON'S BOY;

OR,

THE INNOCENT ONE OF THE FAMILY.

A STORY OF THE ADVENTURES OF A NATURAL BORN VENTRILOQUIST.

By TOM TEASER,

Author of "Truthful Jack; or, On Board the Nancy Jane," "Fred Fresh; or, As Green as Grass," etc., etc.

PART I.

DICK RICHARDSON was a natural ventriloquist and was born that way.

He did not know it till he was about fourteen, however, but then he made up for lost time.

A traveling showman happened to come to town and Dick went to see him, although the Parson did not approve of such things.

Dick was the Parson's boy, you know, and was supposed to be brought up straight.

Well, he took in the show and gave all hands and the professor a grand surprise.

The showman gave an exhibition of ventriloquism, imitating different animals and throwing his voice to various parts of the stage.

Dick listened and watched and finally it came over him that he could do that sort of thing himself.

He had heard of the thing, of course, but did not know what it was like.

All of a sudden a voice seemed to come from the rear of the hall, Dick being seated in the second row from the front.

"I can do that myself," it said.

Everybody looked around, the professor seemed surprised and then asked:

"Oh, you think you can, eh?"

"Certainly," and this time the voice came from the skylight.

The folks all looked up, the professor was still more surprised, and asked again:

"Will you come up on the stage?"

"Here I am," said a voice at the professor's elbow.

The audience was very much mystified, and the showman was a bit astonished himself.

"Lift up that there trap," cried a smothered voice apparently from under the platform.

"Oh, you're there, are you?" asked the showman, intending to do a little ventriloquism on his own account.

"No, I'm here," and the voice sounded from the rear again.

The crowd thought that the showman had been doing it all, and they applauded vigorously.

"You're cheering the wrong feller, boys," said a voice from the back of the stage. "His nibbs didn't do that."

The professor began to get nervous and came forward to say something.

"I ain't any good, fellows," he seemed

to say, although he had not opened his face.

"Gentlemen and ladies," he began, "I must really—"

"Shut up, and give a better man a chance," interrupted a voice from the gallery.

Dozens of people turned their heads to see who had spoken, and then a voice from the back of the stage said:

"Give that little fellow down there in the second row a chance, fellows."

Everybody looked at Dick, but he put on an innocent look, and nobody tumbled to him.

Then they applauded the professor, and he bowed his thanks and seemed to say:

"Much obliged, folks, but I didn't do all that."

"Signor Stepnose, the renowned wire walker, will now perform his justly celebrated act," he said, hastily.

"You're no good," sang out a voice from the main chandelier.

That was Dick's work, of course, as had been the whole business.

"Put that man out," said the showman.

"Here I am, put me out if you can," said a voice right under his feet.

He realized that there was another and better ventriloquist than himself in the house, and he looked all over the front rows to see if he could discover him.

Dick looked terribly innocent, although he said, throwing his voice out of the professor's mouth.

"I'm only a skin, fellows. You mustn't think I do all this."

At the same time the young scamp preserved a firm rigidity of his facial muscles, and those sitting next to him could not see so much as a twitch in his lips.

The professor went off mad, and something else took his place.

Dick did not give the thing away just a little bit, but when he went home proceeded to try a few experiments.

He made the parson think there was a bee in the room, and sent him chasing all over to find it.

He imitated the squeak of a mouse right under his mother's chair, and put her in a terrible fright in consequence.

The hired girl was nearly thrown into a fit because she thought there was a cat in the oven, a dog in the flour barrel, and a rooster in the china closet.

That young rascal Dick was at the bottom of the whole business.

His first appearance as a ventriloquist was a decided success.

After this he practiced and got the thing down fine.

He got hold of all the books on the subject he could find, and made all sorts of experiments until he was away up in the science.

It was a natural gift with him, however, and that's how he caught on so quick and improved so rapidly.

Two years rolled by, and all the time he never gave the thing away, not even to his chums, and here is where our story starts.

Dick was sixteen, not very big, as innocent looking as a baby, but as full of pranks, snaps, jokes and larks as a mule is chucked with viciousness.

In fact, he was called the innocent one of the family, and if any mischief was indulged in he was the last one to be accused of it.

His mother always defended him, and she got free of snaps, but the Parson did not always believe him to be the innocent kid he looked and would say as much.

"What! That innocent boy do a thing of that sort?" his mother would say.

"Nonsense! How can you look at him and say that?"

All the same, he was at the bottom of all the pranks played.

No one could really say he was, however, particularly when he put his ventriloquial powers into practice, for that was something that none of them got onto.

About this time, two nephews of the Parson's, young fellows from the city, were sent to their uncle to be reformed.

No school, public or private, would have them, no tutor would undertake to teach them, and nobody wanted them around.

They were up to all sorts of rackets, and nobody was safe.

Moreover, their larks were not good-natured ones, for they played tricks which injured their victims, and they had been threatened with lickings more than once.

On such occasions each told upon the other and tried to sneak out of the responsibility of the affair.

They played such snaps as yanking a chair from under a person when he went to sit down, scaring the senses out of timid children with ghost fakes, putting pins alongside a fellow's nose, and suddenly calling to him to look around—all that sort of mean business.

They got hated for it, and would have been licked if they had played the snaps on

boys bigger than themselves, which they took good care not to do.

Well, these two chumps, Hiram and Rastus Diggs, were sent to the country to live with the Parson, with a view to their mental, moral and physical improvement.

They were older than Dick, Hiram being nearly seventeen and Rastus something over eighteen, and that innocent kid was considered to be their legitimate prey as soon as they set eyes on him.

Dick sized them up in two shakes and made up his mind that there was going to be war from the start.

"All right, sonnies," he said to himself, "but I guess that if you tackle this young fellow you'll get more than you expected."

The next day the city boys put a pint of pins in the hired man's bed, and when he turned in that night he had a sharp time of it.

Jonas made a fuss the next day, and threatened to lick the fellows that played that snap on him, intimating that he would start on the brothers.

Then they squealed on Dick and said that he was the fellow.

Dick said nothing, but he did some tall thinking.

Later on Hiram and Rastus hooked a litter of young pigs and put them in the cook stove over night.

Fortunately, Sadie, the hired girl, opened the oven door before she made the fire in the morning, or there would have been roast pig for dinner.

The hired girl nearly had a fit, and the shoats ran all over the room and made no end of a row.

Those two chumps of jokers, when accused of the trick laid it on Dick, and the Parson began to lecture him.

"The idea of accusing that innocent boy," said the Parson's wife. "Any one could tell to look at him that he did not do it."

Dick did not say whether he did or not, for he wasn't squealing.

All the same, he had it in for those cousins of his.

"I don't mind any little snaps like that," he muttered, "but wait till they get in deeper and then I'll duck 'em."

Just about that time Dick worked off a little racket of his own which was a biscuit taker and no error.

The Parson made Dick go to meeting whenever the church was open, whether it was regular service, prayer meeting, conference or anything else.

He may have thought that if he had his eye on the young fellow the latter would not be up to mischief.

If he did think so he made a huge mistake, as you will see.

Dick would just as soon put up a job in church as anywhere else, and it did not make a cent's worth of difference whether anyone had their eyes on him or not.

That was the beauty of his ventriloquism, he didn't need a mustache to hide his mouth and he could practice it anywhere.

One evening shortly after the arrival of his cousins, Dick had to attend a meeting in the vestry or whatever else they called it, and here was where he worked up his snap.

It was a week day night and the brethren and sisters had gathered for the purpose of preparing for a fair or festival or something of that sort.

There was no need of Dick being present, as he had no vote, but the Parson made him go all the same.

"It will keep him out of mischief," he had said to his wife. "That boy needs constant watching."

Dick had a seat on the side, away up front, close to the platform, in plain sight of everybody.

No one would suppose that he could get into mischief in such a conspicuous place, but he did, for all that.

The proceedings opened as all such affairs do, and then the parson proceeded to unfold a plan of his own.

First, however, he turned his back on the crowd and began looking over a lot of papers on a table behind the desk.

He was a bit deaf, the Parson was, and that's what favored Dick.

The brethren and sisters waiting for the parson to unfold his plans were very much startled to hear him say:

"If we have a fair, I do hope that Sister Mifflins and Brother Jigson won't get to flirting the way they did at the last one and scandalize everybody. Mrs. Jigson doesn't like it."

Sister Mifflins and Brother Jigson both blushed and looked very mad.

"And there's Brother Sam Hobbins," continued the Parson, apparently still busy at his papers, *"the way he plays poker is outrageous. He had much better put more money into the basket than gamble it away. I don't believe he has put in a dollar in six weeks."*

It was Brother Sam Hobbins' turn to look indignant, for he was one of the most sanctimonious old duffers in all the flock and didn't know a queen from an ace.

"And I hope we won't hear of John Wiggleton drinking any more hard cider," the voice went on. *"His nose is a sight to behold now and I wouldn't like to see it get any worse."*

"Sister Sawdusty has got to stop sending letters to Deacon Brown or she'll hear from me, you bet, to say nothing of the Deacon's wife. It's scandalous."

"Then, there's Brother Blowhard. If he doesn't stop smoking cigarettes and playing the races, he'll get fetched up with a round turn and don't you forget it."

Just then the Parson turned around, stepped forward and said:

"My dear brethren and sisters, I—"

That was as far as he got.

Those mad brothers and sisters made it warm for him.

They did not like to be talked to in that style, right out in meeting.

The best and soberest of them had been accused of things they would never think of doing and it made them mad enough.

Moreover some of the unregenerate had giggled and that made them madder yet.

When the Parson turned around he got it hot and strong.

Brother Jigson was on his feet in a jiffy with half a score of singing books in his hand, while Sam Hobbins caught up a hassock.

Sister Mifflins jumped up and began to talk at the rate of nineteen to the dozen, while Sister Sawdusty began to get hysterical.

Then the air was full of flying missiles all aimed at the Parson's head.

"Say I play poker, do you?"

"Call me a cider drinker, hey?"

"Tell me I smoke cigarettes again if you dare."

"Flirting with that old hen Mifflins, hey? Well, I guess not!"

All had something to say, and all had something to throw.

Books, ottomans, and other movable furniture went flying through the air.

That bad Dick sat there looking as innocent as a clam, and nothing touched him.

Nobody suspected him, either, for he had not moved or opened his head.

As for the Parson, he was just paralyzed.

He did not know what all the fracas was about, and he was decidedly astonished.

He dodged some of the missiles and got hit with others, but managed to say:

"Friends, friends, brethren, sisters, my dear hearers, what does this mean?"

All hands tried to talk at once, and the hubbub was something awful.

The Parson could not make head or tail of it.

Some of the gang flounced out of the room and declared that they would have nothing more to do with a church where they were so grossly insulted.

Brother Sam Hobbins wanted to lick the Parson then and there, and swore that he would unless the latter apologized.

"Really, I don't know what you mean, Brother Hobbins," said the puzzled Parson.

"What you want to say I play poker for and don't put no money in the box?" demanded Hobbins.

"And how dare you say I flirted with that old wreck, Jigson, for?" asked Sister Mifflins.

"Really, Brother Hobbins, Sister Mifflins, I never made any such remark."

"Yes, you did," cried all the crowd, and they would not have it otherwise.

The Parson stuck to it that he had not, and Jigson, Hobbins, Brown and Mifflins

were fully as positive in declaring that he had.

There the matter stood, and the Parson had to dismiss the meeting, for half of the gang cleared out.

Dick got home early that night, but he made up his mind to let his father alone after that.

The trouble was settled by the Parson going privately to the aggrieved members of his gang and apologizing, though he really had done nothing.

He did not tumble to the real cause of the racket, although he suspected that Dick had something to do with it.

Hiram and Rastus Diggs got onto the thing when they heard of it, and they gave Dick away.

"He's a ventriloquist," they said, and gave a full explanation of what that meant.

"Nonsense," said the Parson's wife. "That innocent boy talk like his father? Of course not."

Hiram and Rastus were not believed in that quarter, although the Parson credited their story.

He called Dick up to give him a lecture, but he had not said a dozen words before the voice of Jonas, the hired man, was heard floating in at the open window:

"Hi! hi! Parson, come out here. The old sow has swallowed a bee hive."

The Parson dashed out of the door and Dick left by way of the window.

Jonas wasn't within forty rods of the place, and the old sow was fast asleep and nowhere near the bee hives.

When that befooled Parson went back to his study there was no Dick in sight.

"Really, I do verily believe the boy must possess some gift of that sort," muttered the old gent. "It fairly passes belief."

Dick did not get the jawing that had been promised him, and he was ready for another racket as soon as it came along.

Jonas, the hired man, like a good many other hard working men in the rural districts, had a fondness for cider which has passed its youth and entered upon the state of old age.

He was not satisfied to drink at long intervals, however, but wanted it early and often, his times of imbibing increasing at an alarming ratio as the days went on.

At first it was three times a day, then six, then once an hour, then twice an hour, and finally every fifteen minutes.

There was great danger that the cellar stairs would be worn out from the frequency of the man's visits to the lower regions where he kept his jug, unbeknown to the Parson, and so he removed it to the barn.

He could go there as often as he liked without attracting attention, and then it was more convenient. Dick had tumbled to this habit of the hired man's, and he concluded to get some fun out of it.

One morning, after Jonas had made four or five trips to the jug in the barn, the young fellow went in, abstracted the jug, poured its contents into another, and put kerosene oil in its place.

Replacing the jug where he had found it Dick hid in the hay not far away and awaited developments.

Before long, in came Jonas casting cautious glances around.

"Beats all how dry I be this morning? blamed if it don't," he casually remarked.

Then he lifted the jug from its hiding place and drew out the cork.

"Look out Jonas," said a squeaky voice from the jug. "If you swallow me you'll get fits."

"Gee whittaker rattlesnakes! who's that?" gasped Jonas.

"It's me!" piped up the voice. "I'm a watching you, old man."

"Durned if I can see any one," muttered Jonas casting a scared glance around the place.

"No, of course you can't," chuckled the voice, "but I can see you. I'm in the jug. You've been stirring me up pretty lively this morning, Jonas."

"Great guns!" muttered Jonas, hurriedly pulling down the jug, "who be ye anyhow?"

"Just a big snake, that's all, Jonas, but if I come out and get into your skin, you'll wish I hadn't, he, he!"

"Gosh! I didn't s'pose I'd get 'em so

quick," gasped the hired man as he sneaked out.

It was not long, however, before he came in again, peered all around and collared the jug.

He had it to his lips when a smothered voice exclaimed:

"Hi, hi! look out, there, you're swallowing me!"

That very much frightened hired man dropped that jug in a hurry, sputtering and gasping:

"Gee-whizz! What in thunder is in the durned thing?"

"Hanged if you haven't swallowed me, Jonas," said a voice which appeared to come from his stomach.

"Guess I've swallowed something durned funny, anyhow," muttered the man, wiping his mouth on his sleeve.

"Yes, you have, and I'm going to hustle to get out. I'm the snake that lives in the jug, I am, he-he-he, ha-ha!"

"Gee-whizz! I've got 'em sure!" howled Jonas, as he made a break and scooted for the door.

He caught his foot in a loose plank and sprawled out on the dusty floor in a jiffy.

"Ho, ho, he! he, he, he! ha, ha, ha! I'm out!" chuckled a squeaking voice. "Here I go into the jug. I'll see you later, old man."

"Gosh all blazes!" ejaculated Jonas, getting up. "I've got ter quit drinkin'! Whao! what durned smell is that? 'Pears like somebody's been spillin' ile around."

He picked up the jug gave it a sniff, looked disgusted and then dropped it in a terrible fright as a laughing voice piped up from out the mouth:

"Try some more, Jonas, it's good and strong!"

Smash went the jug on the floor, and out went Jonas as though the devil were after him.

In fact he firmly believed that such was the case, and his hair stood up straight like bristles on the back of an angry pig.

That jug's usefulness as a jug had passed, and all it was good for now was to put on top of the orchard wall as a terror to poachers.

Dick came out when the coast was clear and chucked the jug on a rubbish heap behind the barn, where Jonas presently found it.

"Durned shame to lose all that good cider," he muttered. "I might ha' dranked that and then quit fur good."

"Jonas!" sang out a voice from the house.

It was only Dick, just around the corner of the barn, however.

"There's that durned gal calling me," growled Jonas. "What in time does she want now?"

Into the house he went where Sadie was washing clothes.

"What you want of me?" he asked.

"Don't want nothing of you," snapped Sadie, who was not fond of the hired man.

"What you want to call me for then if you didn't want nothing?"

"Didn't call you."

"Yes, you did."

"I say I didn't."

"You did so!"

Swish!

That was a wet towel which took Jonas in the ear.

"Tell me I lie, will you?" cried the angry Sadie. "Take that!"

Swash!

That was a dipperful of hot water and soapsuds.

Out dashed Jonas, not caring to continue the argument.

"Jonas, you've got to quit drinking or you'll get the bounce," said the voice of the Parson, as the hired man reached the barn.

He looked all around in a scared manner, but saw no one.

Master Dick was at it again, for the Parson was hard at work on his next week's sermon in the study.

"Hain't been drinkin', Pa'son," sputtered Jonas, trying to locate the voice.

"Yes, you have, and you'll get hoodooed if you don't brace up."

It was certainly Mr. Richardson's voice, although Jonas had never known his master to use slang.

"Durned if I haven't got 'em," he muttered as he skinned out. "Blow me if I ever liked hard cider anyhow."

Away he went on a dead run, but not too quickly to hear a voice over his head, saying:

"Got 'em again, have you? Snakes!"

After that he didn't stop till he reached the potato patch, a quarter of a mile away, when he grabbed up a hoe and began to work as if his life depended upon it.

He did not sample any more hard cider that day, you can bet, nor the next either.

"I think I rattled him pretty bad," remarked Dick, as he saw Jonas come into supper the next night soberer than he had been in a month.

It was a fact, but all the same, Dick intended to have just as much fun out of him in one condition as in another.

PART II.

IT was a lovely day in May, the birds were singing, the bullfrogs were grunting, and all nature seemed to be on a spree when Dick started out for a racket.

He was going to the store to order some things for the house, but that did not prevent his having lots of fun just the same.

On the way, shortly after leaving the house, he met Squire Muddle.

Now Squire Muddle was one of the characters of that town, and a man to be remembered when once you saw him.

The squire was tall, lanky, bald-headed, hooked-nosed, always wore a claw-hammer coat and a big, wide-brimmed, white beaver hat, carried a stick with a hook handle, and was as cranky as they make folks now-a-days.

Though bald on the top of his head, his hair was long enough behind, and when he kept his hat on, which was always, except at his meals, or when asleep, you had the impression that he had plenty of hair.

This was the old duffer whom Dick met when he was on the way to the store that pleasant morning.

"Good-morning, Squire Muddle," said the young fellow, touching his hat.

"Mornin'," grunted the Squire, proceeding on his way, for it was beneath his dignity to stop to speak to a boy, even if that boy were related to the Parson.

"Come over here, Squire, I want to speak to you a minute."

It was Dick who said that, but the voice seemed to come from the other side of the wall which skirted the side of the road.

There was a dilapidated, very-much-the-worse-for-wear scarecrow, of last year's crop, standing just on the other side of the wall.

You could see the dusty hat, the tattered coat and part of the sieve-like trousers, but not the pole on which they hung.

The thing looked like a tramp, for it had a head and, at that instance, with the face turned away, had a very natural appearance.

"Hey, what's say?" asked the squire, turning and looking at Dick.

"Come over here, I want to talk to you."

Dick had apparently not spoken, for not a muscle moved.

"Hey? Who's that talkin'?" grunted the squire.

"Come over here, I tell you."

The sound came from the other side of the wall.

"Oh, it's you, is it? Well, what do you want?" and the squire went across the road.

He forgot all about Dick from that moment, being decidedly absent minded.

"I say, old chum, lend me half a dollar?"

That's what the scarecrow seemed to say.

"Why, why, you miserable tramp, you disreputable old villain, how dare you speak to me like that?"

"Go get a wig, you old fossil!"

That made the squire madder than being asked to lend a tramp fifty cents.

"How dare you? I will have you committed as a nuisance."

"It's against the law, squire."

"What's against the law?"

"To commit a nuisance. Say, got a chew of tobacco handy?"

Squire Muddle never chewed or smoked, considering tobacco in all forms an abomination.

"How dare you?" he sputtered.

"Ah, go get your hair cut."

This was too much for the squire.

He was near-sighted as well as absent-minded.

"How dare you?" he said again.

Then he raised his stick to chastise that impudent tramp.

"Look out, I'll shoot if you hit me."

The squire jumped back as if he had already been shot.

"Morning, squire. How'd you like my last sermon?"

This time it was the Parson's voice, but the latter was nowhere to be seen.

The squire turned, forgetting all about the tramp in a second.

"Good morning, Parson, good morning. You gave us a fast rate dis—why, why, where is the man?"

"Look out! Don't step on me!"

Squire Muddle jumped back in alarm.

He could see nothing and now his back was turned to Dick.

"Look where you're going, you old chump. You'll upset my basket of chickens."

The squire jumped back again, forgetting all about the Parson as well as Dick and the tramp.

Dick was now on the other side of the wall out of sight.

As Squire Muddle jumped, a lot of chickens, old and young, began to sputter and cackle and make all sorts of noises.

You would have thought that the road was full of poultry, by the racket.

One old hen seemed to be right under the Squire's foot and he nearly had a fit.

"Now then, Clumsy, you'll have to pay for that fowl."

The squire jumped again, and concluded he must be going blind or crazy, or something.

He could not see man or hens, but he could hear them all the same.

"Say, squire, where's that fifty cents?"

It was the tramp this time, and the squire forgot all about the man and his chickens whom he had been supposed to have run into.

Around he turned and faced the tramp in wrath.

"How dare you?"

"Yah! You're no good!"

The squire raised his stick to strike the tramp, being now just on the rear side of the wall.

Dick was behind the wall, grasping the pole that supported the scarecrow.

He suddenly gave it a yank out of the ground and over went the whole business on top of the squire.

"Yah! take that!"

The supposed tramp had got one crack, but the collection of rubbish now fell on the squire's head.

"Bow-wow-wow grr-ow!"

That was a dog apparently close at his heels.

If there was one thing he detested it was a dog, and at the sound he dusted, posting straight back to town and forgetting all about what had fetched him out, Dick following at a more leisurely gait, whistling gayly as he went along.

One pleasant Sunday morning, a few days later, the Parson had an engagement to preach for a brother minister in a neighboring town.

Ministers swap pulpits occasionally, when they feel lazy and don't want to get up a new sermon, for it's easy enough to palm off an old one on a strange congregation.

A minister wants to have a good memory, that's all, and label his sermons when he inflicts them upon strangers, so as not to give the same people the same thing more than twice.

Our parson was a man of methods, and his interchangeable discourses were all ticketed, as, for instance, "Used at Way-back, '89," "Done in Slowcome, '87," "Preached to the Methodists of Yelling in '90, will do for the Baptists," and many others.

Having gone carefully over his stock of outsiders, the Parson selected one that had not been used more than six times, stuck it in his pocket, told Jonas to hitch up, and then proceeded to give his few stray locks the proper polishing, straightened his

white choker, put on his coat and hat, and sat down to wait till Jonas called him.

"Where is Richard?" he presently asked. "I think I will take him to Hollerton with me this morning."

"Gone to Sunday-school, I guess," said the parson's wife.

Then those two sneaks, Hiram and Rastus Diggs, put in their oars.

"Oh, yes, like fun," said Hiram. "What does he want a box of bait for if he's went to Sunday-school?"

"He's gone fishing, that's what he has," chimed in Rastus, "I seen him start."

Mrs. Richardson gave a scream of horror.

now they were at the bottom of the tureen.

Away they went to the church, kicking themselves for having spoken too previously.

As a matter of cold fact, Dick had gone fishing.

That is to say, he was not fishing himself, but he was with a gang who were.

He did not think it any fun to sit on the end of a bridge for hours, getting the skin peeled off his nose just for the sake of telling how near he came to getting that big perch, or how narrowly he missed hooking that monstrous pickerel or some other fishy yarn like that.

All the same he liked to watch others do

"Hello, Dick, how goes it?"

"How'd you manage to sneak?"

"Dad don't know it, does he?"

"Parson out of town, hey, Dick?"

These were some of the remarks with which the fishermen greeted the Parson's boy.

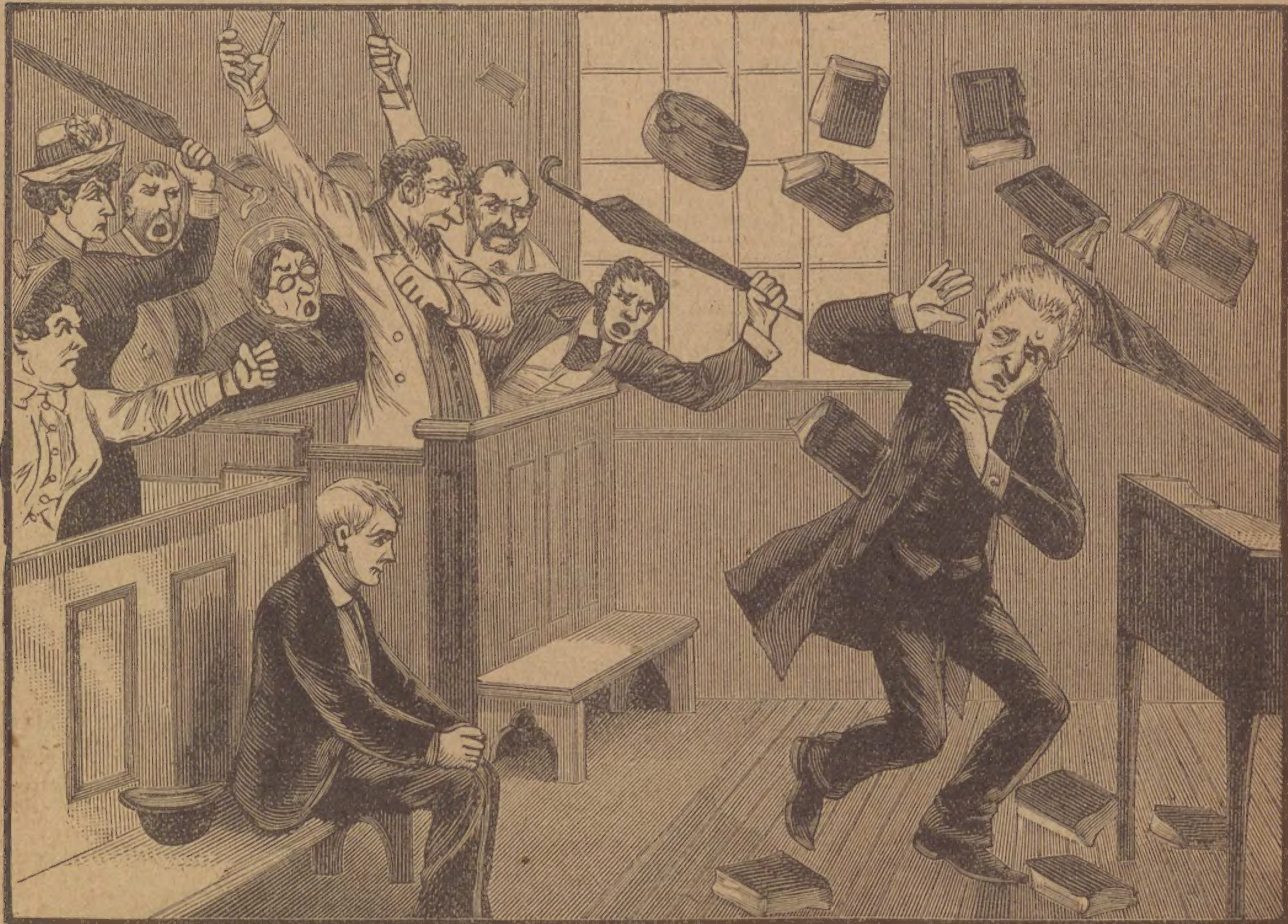
"Dad's all right, he's gone to Hollerton to get rid of one of his second-hand sermons. How are they running? Got any bites?"

"Had a couple of nibbles just now."

"Something's sneaking around my hook, I guess."

"H'm, yah! there! I just missed him. Don't talk so loud, you fellows."

Dick sat on the guard rail of the bridge,



He did not know what all the fracas was about, and he was decidedly astonished. He dodged some of the missiles, and got hit with others, but managed to say: "Friends, friends, brethren, sisters, my dear hearers, what does this mean?" All hands tried to talk at once, and the hubbub was something awful.

"That innocent boy gone fishing!" she indignantly protested. "Impossible."

"H'm, it might be possible," said the Parson, "but it is not grammatically correct to say 'has went' and 'I seen.' Gone fishing, eh? I trust that you two young gentlemen will set him a good example and go to Sunday-school. I hear the bell ringing, so you have no time to lose."

"The idea of accusing that innocent boy of going fishing on the Sabbath," muttered the Parson's wife. "He would not do such a wicked thing. I am astonished at your saying it."

Just then Jonas stuck his head in at the door and said:

"Mare's all ready if you be. If you mean to get to Hollerton in time you'd better be startin', I guess."

"Yes, to be sure. Now, boys, it's time to start," muttered the Parson, getting up.

Hiram and Rastus were in for it, and no mistake.

They had intended to go off into the woods and smoke till dinner time, but now they were dished.

If they had kept their lips buttoned down it would have been all right, but

it for a short time and that's what he was doing at the moment when the Parson left home.

Half a mile from the house there was a river and a bridge, some shady trees, a stretch of sunlit meadows and an old oak where one could lie at full length on the moss and take in chunks of solid comfort by the hour.

On the stringers of this bridge, a rude rural affair, sat four young fellows from out of town, this pleasant Sunday morning their rods in their hands, their baskets by their sides, their floats bobbing lazily upon the water below.

Nobody had caught anything yet, but they expected to do so all the same.

They did not expect what they were going to catch, however, I may say.

Presently along came Dick, fishing for fun, not fish.

That yarn of Hiram's about his having gone off with a box of bait in his pocket was nothing but a campaign lie intended to injure Richard's reputation.

He had nothing of the sort, and he never went fishing.

"Hello, fellers," he said as he came up, being acquainted with those bad young men from out of town.

where he was shaded, pushed his straw hat upon the back of his head, and began to whittle.

What boy does not like to loaf and whittle and take in nature by the square foot on a mild, spring morning, when all the earth seems to be asleep?

Dick did, at all events, and he was just enjoying himself and no error, when he heard a suspicious sound not far away.

The four piscators were devoting their entire attention to coaxing the finny tribe to come out and take a nip, although not a fish had, as yet, accepted the invitation, and all they heard was the rippling of the stream.

Dick heard something else.

"Plunk, plunk, plunk!" it sounded along the dusty road.

There was only one nag that stepped like that.

The particular creak which accompanied the sound was also as well known as the tones of his father's voice.

Even without the short, impatient snap of the whip and the strident, "Get up, Fan," Dick would have known that his father was coming along the road in the old buggy, drawn by the sore mare.

A quick turn of his curly head convinced Dick that such was indeed the fact.

"Moses in the canebrake!" he suddenly exclaimed. "I forgot all about pop. I thought he'd gone!"

He hopped off that guard rail in a jiffy; jumped upon one of the stringers and dove under the bridge.

There was a cross girder there, on which he could sit and be totally out of sight from everybody except a fellow coming up stream in a boat.

"Go right on, you fellows," said Dick, when he had secreted himself, "but don't give me away. That's the Parson coming."

The fishermen snickered, but they never intended to betray their young friend.

They knew who Dick's father was but they had never seen him, and he did not know them from Beelzebub's brother-in-law.

Along came the Parson, the old mare prodding along at a steady gait, as became a minister's plug, not too fast nor yet too slow, but at a good, respectable, church-going pace.

You never would call that mare a racer, nor yet could you say she was a snail, her gait being a sort of half compromise between crawling and trotting.

That was what made her give that "plunk-plunk-plunk," as she came along, the old buggy creaking an accompaniment and the Parson giving the whip an occasional snap.

Fan did not care a copper for the snap of a whip, knowing very well that the Parson would never touch her with it, and the only thing she did mind was the Parson's voice.

His "get up, Fan" might not quicken her speed when on the road, but it would start her up, when at rest, and nothing else would.

You could leave that animal standing in the road anywhere and at any time, and you might shout at her, and tell her to get up until the cows came home, and all to no purpose.

The parson was the only one she would pay any attention to, and for that reason if any one of the family desired to go anywhere and the Parson could not accompany them, they were obliged to walk.

The Parson understood Fan, and Fan understood the Parson, and that was all there was to it.

Well, along came the Parson and Fan and the old buggy, this beautiful Sunday morning, with the four fellows fishing from the bridge and Dick under it, awaiting developments.

When the Parson reached the bridge he saw the four fishermen, and looked displeased.

He did not see Dick, however, and there was some satisfaction in that.

The occasion must not be allowed to pass without his reading these wicked young men a lesson.

If his son had been among them he would have done just the same.

He did not know then, and he was glad he did not, for now he could enlarge upon the good qualities of the boys of his own town and congregation.

"Whoa!" grunted the parson, as he came to the middle of the bridge.

The buggy top was turned clear back as the morning was mild and the good man did not have the sun in his face.

That well disciplined mare stopped and stood stock still in her steps.

The fishermen went on fishing, notwithstanding the admonishing grunt that the parson gave.

They were ready to split with laughter when they thought of Dick under the bridge, but they said not a word.

The young rascal was directly beneath the old plug in fact.

Only an inch plank separated him from her, and that did not do much service.

He could look up through the cracks and see her, and a lot of sand had already sifted down between his shirt collar and skin, as Fan swung her tail around to knock out a fly, and so shook the slight structure.

"Ahem!" muttered the Parson, standing up in the buggy.

Nobody said a word, and the Parson, in solemn black, white choker, black gloves and tall dicer, standing there in the buggy,

proceeded to give those young sinners plazes, so to speak.

"Young men," he said severely, "are you not aware that you are desecrating the Sabbath? Don't you know that you are committing a great sin?"

Nobody acquiesced in or denied the proposition.

"It is not necessity which compels you to fish on the Sabbath, for you appear to be well-dressed and in no great need, and therefore it is all the more a sin."

"I could condone the offense if poverty forced you to fish on the Sabbath for the sake of procuring your daily food, but it does not, and there is no excuse."

"I am glad to see that you are strangers. None of the young men of our town would so far forget what is due to themselves and their pastors as to go fishing on the Sabbath, and I can see that you are ashamed of it yourselves, as you go where you are not known in order to pursue your sinful pleasures."

The Parson went on to the same effect and to a considerable length, and no one said a word.

He just laid those young fellows out, and Dick heard every word of it.

The lesson may not have sunk into his heart, but the sand sunk into his shirt just the same, and he didn't like it a little bit.

Meantime Fan stood there on the middle of the bridge as still as a stone.

She continued to do so, in fact, until Dick said two or three short words.

After that there came a change.

PART III.

THE Parson had paused to catch his breath before going on with his lecture to those bad young fishermen.

"Get up Fan!"

It was the Parson's tone, his expression and everything else.

The Parson's voice never uttered those words, however.

That rascal, Dick, had used his ventriloquial powers upon the old mare and with great success.

Upon the instant that Fan heard the familiar command, off she started at her usual pace.

The result was anything but gratifying to the Parson.

The sudden start was too much for his equilibrium.

Over he went, there was a flash of something black in mid-air, there was a thump on the bridge and Master Dick was deluged with sand.

Fortunately the Parson struck the buggy top when he made that sudden revolution, or the result might have been disastrous.

When he recovered from his surprise, he was sitting in the middle of the bridge, looking after a runaway horse now jogging at a good pace along the road.

Then it was that those four bad fishermen could not restrain themselves.

They had to laugh or burst, and they laughed.

In fact, they fairly howled and yelled with mirth.

The tears rolled down their cheeks, and it was a wonder that they did not fall off the bridge.

As for the Parson, he picked himself up in a hurry, shook himself together, grabbed his hat and started off after that runaway mare.

He would have been glad to continue his lecture upon the sinfulness of Sabbath breaking, but this was neither the time nor the occasion.

If he did not stop that nag of his, he was in for a five mile tramp along a dusty road, or else he would be obliged to let his team go on alone and be returned at the convenience of his neighbors.

Off he started on a dead run, by no means a dignified proceeding for a clergyman at any time, and particularly on a Sunday morning.

"Whoa!" he yelled, as he bolted off.

At first Fan did not hear him and kept right on at her regular jog.

The poor man had to run a good quarter of a mile before he could get near enough to make the mare hear, and by that time he was all out of breath, reeking with perspiration, and as mad as a clergyman can get without disgracing his cloth.

He climbed into the buggy, wiped his perspiring brow, took a long breath, and then started Fan off again at an easy pace, musing, as he jogged on, over his late misfortune.

"Very extraordinary, very," he muttered. "Never knew the beast to go ahead like that at anybody's command. What could have induced her to do it? I'm glad Richard was not with those sinful young men. If he had been I would have suspected him of some of his tricks."

That's all we've got to do with the Parson at present, and now we'll return to Dick.

After his father was well out of the way, the young rascal came from his hiding-place, shook the sand in his shirt down into his shoes, resumed his former seat and drily remarked:

"Pop took a tumble that time and he didn't. The weather still remains salubrious in my part of the country."

"What made the old plug start up so sudden?" asked one of the four.

"Took it into his head to do so, I suppose," remarked Dick.

He was not giving anything away, for those fellows didn't know anything about his powers as a ventriloquist.

"Why, the old man told her to go on, of course," said the second. "I heard him plain enough."

"Then I reckon she started up quicker than he expected," said a third.

"Yes, I think she did," remarked that innocent Dick, going on with his whittling.

"Chuck!"

That was the sound of a bob going suddenly under the water.

All four fisherman darted swift glances at their lines.

All four bobs were as before, however, and not a line had tautened.

"Gee! thought I had a bite," they all said, in chorus.

"Who's that coming down the road?" asked Dick.

The fishermen turned their heads toward him and lost sight of their lines.

"Chuck, chuck!"

Two bobs had gone under, apparently, and with a jerk, too.

All four piscators yanked up their lines in a jiffy.

There wasn't a thing on them.

"That's funny!" they all said.

"Splash!"

That was a fish jumping out of water.

Down went those four lines in a hurry.

"Ain't you ashamed to be fishin' on Sunday, you young scamps?"

The fishermen turned abruptly, for that was the voice of the sheriff of their own town.

They saw nobody but Dick, and he was sitting there as innocent as a baby, whittling a stick.

They all four of them stared at him, and then they heard the regular dip of oars, the creak of the shafts in the oarlocks and the splash of the water.

They never suspected Dick of making those sounds for his face was as motionless as a block of marble.

"Hi there, I've got them lines now, sure enough."

That was the sheriff, and he was coming along the river in a boat.

That is, the four fishermen thought he was.

As a matter of fact, there was no sheriff, no boat, nothing.

They all hauled up their lines in a jiffy and leaned over till they nearly fell off the stringer.

"Gee! that's funny, where's he gone to?"

"I'll swear I heard him! Didn't you, Jake?"

"Of course I did, but where is he now?"

"Hanged if I know," and the fourth fellow got up and crossed to the other side of the bridge to look for the sheriff and his boat.

"That's mighty funny," he muttered.

"Where is he, anyhow?"

"Help, help! I'm drowning!"

It was a girl's voice, and came from the river.

All hands chucked off their coats and shoes and jumped into the river in a jiffy.

When they came up there wasn't a thing in sight.

Girl, boat, sheriff and all had mysteriously disappeared.

"I'll be durned!" said all four.
 "Well, fellows, I guess I'll be going," said Dick. "Hope you enjoyed your bath and that you'll catch lots of fish."
 Then away he went, whistling and whittling, leaving those four wet and very much puzzled fishermen to wade out, after looking in vain for the drowning girl.
 "That'll pay for the tumble dad got," muttered the Parson's boy, as he crossed a field. "Golly, but how scared they looked. That was the best fun I've had in a week."
 The Parson came home just before supper time, but Dick was at a chum's house, and nothing was said about the upset.
 Those two chumps, Hiram and Rastus, reported upon their return that Dick had

He wore a high stove pipe hat, which was immediately crushed.
 No harm was done to the coon, but he was mad all the same.
 "Hi dere, yo' big Irish loafah," he muttered, straightening himself up, "wha' yo' mean by frowin' dem tings at me?"
 The Irishman turned, looked at the coon and asked:
 "Did he get eout?"
 "Did who get out, yo' big stuff."
 "Don't yez call me that, ye nagur. Did he get out, I say."
 "Who was dat?"
 "The feller in me hod."
 "Was n' no fellah in de hod."
 "Yis, there wor, I h'ard him."

"Hi, dar, wha' yo' doin'?" and Pete sprang back, lowered his bullet head and rushed at his foe.
 The gentleman with the hod jumped away just in time.
 Pete's head struck the ladder a stunning crack and then slipped in between two of the rounds.
 Another Irishman was descending the ladder at that moment.
 The shock shook it so that he lost his grip and went sliding down towards the ground.
 In a jiffy he had straddled Pete's neck and there he held him as in a vise.
 "Oh, glory, wud yez luck at thot?" cried hod carrier No. One.



"Young men," he said severely, "are you not aware that you are desecrating the sabbath? Don't you know that you are committing a great sin?"

not gone to church, thinking to get him into trouble.

Mrs. Richardson would not believe them, however, and declared that they had not gone themselves, or they would certainly have seen their innocent boy in his usual seat.

A day or two after this Master Dick went into town on the lookout for fun, and soon found it.

There was a new house going up, and as Dick came along a big Irishman was ascending a ladder with a hod of bricks on his shoulder.

At the same moment a big darky, who occasionally worked for the parson, came out of the basement of the building.

He had just reached a point a foot or two beyond the ladder when something happened.

The Irishman with the hod had gone up four or five rounds of the ladder when a smothered voice, coming right out from among the bricks, said:

"Hollo! let me out, you're smothering me."

"Howly Pether!" gasped the hod carrier, letting go of the hod.

As a natural result, the load of bricks fell on Pete's head.

"Was n' no fellah der, I tol' yo'. Dey was on'y bricks."

"I say there wor a man in me hod, and he hollered to be let out and I got frick-ened."

"Big liah, dey wasn'," muttered Pete. "You'se drunk, yo' is, an' yo' can't hol' nuffin' I lick yo' fo' two cents."

"Nagur ate railroad iron."

That was Dick, but it sounded like the Irishman.

"Oh, I does, hey?" growled Pete. "Yo' just come down off'n dat ladder an' yo' see wheder I does."

"Go an about yer business. Didn't I tell yez there wor a man in me hod?"

"Fishman lie like de debbil."

No Irishman likes to be told he lies, and this particular one got very mad.

He never doubted that Pete had said it, though the coon had not had time to say a word.

He thought some other coon had spoken, and he looked around to see who it was.

That gave the Irishman time to get down from the ladder.

He sailed into Pete while the latter was looking for the other coon.

Biff!

Bash!

Ireland sailed into Africa in fine style.

"G'off mah haid, yo' big, Irish loafer!" bawled Pete.

"For heaven's sake, phat are yez doin' entirely?" cried No. Two.

"Phat for do yez be shakin' the ladder that way, anyway?"

Then Pete managed to get his head out, and the man jumped to the ground.

On the instant Pete sailed into him, goat fashion, and floored him.

"Och, murther! I'm kilt!" howled the fellow as he sat down, neatly doubled up.

Then Pete shook himself, and looking up, saw the first man laughing at him.

"Ye're a big black chump!"

That was too much for Pete.

He could not understand it, but he did understand that the man had called him a chump.

Of course he never tumbled to Dick, who sat on a pile of bricks whistling.

He went for that first Irishman, who, being so full of laugh, did not have time to get out of the way.

Smash!

Down he went in a second right on top of his friend.

Then there was an Irish stew in just about two shakes.

Both men began pummeling each other like two pugilists.

Each thought that the other was the coon and both meant to give him a pasting.

They got on their feet at last, but went on pounding just the same.

At it they went, hammer and tongs, and the air was blue with lurid remarks.

Pete saw what had happened and he began to laugh, fit to kill himself.

"Yah, yah! look at dem two fishmans!" he roared. "Glory fo' goodness, neber see anything like o' dat. Dat am de bes' ting yet."

"More brick!" yelled the voice of the brick layers.

That is to say, the hod hustlers thought it was he.

and up went the two men on the keen jump.

Thump!

Plunk!

Down went the two hods in a hurry.

The bricklayers went right on with their work and paid no attention.

"More bricks, you loafers, and be quick with 'em."

The two fellows had hardly set foot on the ladder to descend when this order came.

Down they flew and up they went again in a hurry.

"What in thunder are you fetching so many bricks for?" demanded the boss. "I told you I had enough. I want mortar."

over the cellar for the parson, and had not found him.

"Whar am yo', Mis' Rich'son?" he finally asked, coming out.

"Moved, it's the first of May, of course."

"De fust ob May, am it?" muttered Pete, looking around. "Whar am yo' fader, Marse Dick?"

"Up in the building, you donkey."

"Oh, am dat so? Reckon I go look fo' him."

Up he started in a hurry just as the two Irishmen were coming down the same way.

There was a collision, of course, and Pete



Upon the instant that Fan heard the familiar command, off she started at her usual pace. The result was anything but gratifying to the Parson. The sudden start was too much for his equilibrium. Over he went.

They broke away and began to fill their hods with all despatch.

"Fish loafah, big liah."

"Wait till I aren't so busy and I'll parlyze ye for that."

"Go an ye big black robber, yez have no sinse."

"Hurry up with those bricks."

Up the ladder went those two Micks, as tight as they could jump.

"Come on, Peter, I want you."

That was the Parson's voice, sure enough, and the coon looked around for the man himself.

"Where yo' fader, Marse Dick?" he asked.

"In here, you old fool. Can't you see me?"

The sound came from the basement and in went Pete.

Down the ladder came the two hod carriers, having just deposited their loads above.

"More bricks, you Micks!"

"Begorry, they must be in a hurry for thim."

"Be jabers, they do use thim up fasht thin."

The bricks were slammed into the hods

The two men looked at each other in surprise.

"Troth, yez have been yellin' 'more bricks' for the lasht tin minyutes."

"Sure, ye've been giving us no rest at all on them bricks."

"Never said nothing about bricks" muttered the boss. "What do you suppose I want so many bricks for, anyhow, when we're only laying two or three chimneys? This ain't a brick house, you fools."

"Av yez didn't want thim for why did yez ordher thim thin?"

"Sure, yez have uz rinnin' our two legs off for ye, callin' for more bricks ivery two seconds."

The boss looked mad, chucked down his trowel and said:

"For two pins I'd chuck you off the ladder. Go on down and fetch up mortar, you gillies."

"Go to the devil!"

The two hod-carriers seemed to say this, but it was only Dick on the pile of bricks.

"Go to the devil, will I? Well, I guess not," and that mad chimney builder hustled those two Micks off that building in a hurry.

Meanwhile Pete had been hunting all

sat down at the foot of the ladder looking very much used up.

The two brick-wrestlers would have pitched into him again but the boss yelled out to them to hurry up with the mortar and there was no time.

One of them filled his hod ahead of the other and started up the ladder.

The second was only a step behind when Dick yelled out, imitating the boss:

"Look out! The ladder is broken!"

Number one gave a howl and dropped his hod on number two's head.

The load was too much for him and down he slipped, using some very strong language.

"Now, then, where's that mort'?"

This time it was the boss indeed.

"Faix, I'm not going up a broken ladder for any mon."

"Who said the ladder was broken, you chuckle head?"

"Ye said it yerself."

"Yis, and Dinny chucked the full av his hod an me."

"Yez had no right to be right undher me, thin."

"Faix, I'll go where I plase."

There promised to be another fracas in just about half a shake.

"Fetch up that mortar, you clowns."

"I'll not go up a broken laddher for any mon."

"The ladder ain't broke."

"Phwat med ye say it wor?"

"I did not."

"Ye're a liar!"

Down the ladder came the boss in a hurry.

It was quite evident that the ladder was all right by the way he came down.

"Call me a liar, will you? I'll bust your faces open for two cents. Who said I was a liar?"

"Nayther av us did."

It was, literally, a mild day when he proceeded to work off one of his best rackets, a description of which will come in just here.

The parsonage was a rambling old house, with piazzas on nearly all sides of it, windows reaching to the floor, funny old nooks and corners here and there, and all that.

The Parson's study was on the ground floor, and had a sort of glass door, like a window, opening upon the piazza, which was kept open and thrown back in mild weather.

Upon the occasion in question, the Parson was sitting at his desk working up his next Sunday's discourse, when along came Pete.

ers' wives will persist in doing, but he never paid any attention to her unless she spoke to him.

"Now fetch in the wood, you ridiculous coon."

"In de libr'y, boss?" asked Pete.

The Parson turned his head, saw the coon, and seemed to say:

"Yes, you idiot! Get out!"

Out went Pete in a hurry, the Parson's tone being most peremptory.

The good man was on his "thirdly" just then and could not stop to investigate, simply remarking to himself:

"What ails the man? He seemed very much frightened. I suppose he came in here by mistake."



He placed another stick on the buck and got to work, making the sawdust fly. "Get out, I tell you!" howled the Parson, dancing about in an excited manner. Pete went right on and added two pieces to his pile.

"You didn't?"

"No."

The boss looked around to see if there was any one else who might have said it. He saw Dick Richardson walking at an easy gait toward the post office.

Now he happened to know all about Dick's powers, and he was one of the few who did.

"H'm!" he muttered. "Has that boy been here long?"

"About tin minyutes, I suppose."

"Yas'r, he been yer some time, but I can't fin' him fader, fo' nuffin', an' I look all roun' fo' him."

"H'm! that boy has been making fools of the whole of us, I reckon. Go on with your work and if he comes around again let me know."

There was no more trouble in or around the new building after that.

PART IV.

THE weather remained propitious for the Parson's Boy for several days after this, and he managed to have all the fun he wanted without damaging his reputation as the innocent one of the family in the least.

Pete was the darky who worked around the place now and then in connection with Jonas, you will remember.

Dick was also hanging about when Pete walked past the house, and he got to work at once.

"Peter, come in here a moment, I want you."

It was the parson's voice, sure enough, and Pete saw no one else.

In he stepped through the open window, the parson going right on with his writing.

"Fetch in a saw and a buck and seven or eight sticks of wood."

"In de woodshed, yo' mean, boss?" asked Pete.

"No, in here, you chump."

"Pa'son gettin' ter usin' bery funny kin' o' talk dese days," mused Pete as he went out. "Wondah what him con'gation say to dat?"

Away he went, however, returning in a few moments with the saw and buck, which he placed in the middle of the study.

That abstracted Parson went right on with his work, scarcely noticing that any one had entered.

His wife was in the habit of going in occasionally when he was at work, as all writ-

Then he went right on laying out evil-doers and never noticed the saw and buck behind him.

Pretty soon in came Pete with an armful of wood which he dumped on the floor.

"Now, saw it up, you chump."

"A' right, boss, I do it."

"And don't mind me for a cent."

"A' right, boss, I won't."

"Go right on, no matter what I say or do."

"H'm, dat am kind o' funny," muttered the coon, "but I allus 'beys o'ders, I does."

The Parson heard something, being only slightly deaf, but, as he was just then working up some knotty point in doctrine, he did not stop.

Pete put a stick on the borse, stuck his foot on one end of it, grabbed the saw and got to work.

Everybody knows what an everlasting racket a saw makes, especially if it is not well greased.

This was a bit rusty, and Pete happened to strike a knot as well as the Parson.

"Hee-haw, hee-haw, ee!"

It was a cross between the vocal exercises of a mule and the scraping of a shovel on an icy pavement.

The Parson stood it for a few moments until Pete struck the knot.

Then he jumped and looked around.

There was that coon sawing wood in the study, of all places in the world.

He could scarcely believe his eyes.

"Go right on, Peter. Let her go," he seemed to say.

What he did say was rather different.

"What do you mean, sir, by sawing wood in my study? Go outside!"

Peter went right on, and in a jiffy the stick fell apart.

"Stop it, I say!" howled the Parson, jumping up out of his chair.

Pete knew what his orders had been well enough.

He placed another stick on the buck and got to work, making the sawdust fly.

"Get out, I tell you!" howled the Parson, dancing about in an excited manner.

Pete went right on and added two pieces to his pile.

"What do you mean by coming into my study to saw wood? Go out, I say."

The sawing process went right on.

"Stop it, I tell you, stop it! What ails the man? Is he crazy?"

There was a dandy pile of sawdust under the buck, and it was getting bigger every moment.

"Here, here! I won't have it. You are setting me wild! Get out!"

Two more pieces fell on the floor and Pete put on another stick.

The Parson danced about, shouting and gesticulating, and trying to make that persistent coon understand that a minister's study was not the proper place for such a business as sawing wood.

Pete was bound to stick to his first orders, however, if the heavens fell.

Until those seven or eight sticks were sawed up there was no stopping him.

The Parson could not get near him as the saw was in his way and all he could do was to shout and dance.

"Merciful heavens, are you mad? Stop that I say or I shall go crazy. Don't you know any better than that. Go away and don't come around the place any more."

At last there was no more wood to cut and Pete stopped.

"Now pick up that wood and pile it on my desk."

The order was a strange one but Pete carried it out.

"Reckon Pa'son go clean off him head," he muttered, as he dropped an armful of wood on top of the desk, covering up a lot of papers and upsetting the inkstand.

This was too much for the parson, and he flew out of the window as if fired from a mortar.

"Now skip, and take everything with you."

The Parson appeared to say this as he went out, and Pete obeyed.

The distracted man hustled himself around to the other side of the house where his wife was fooling over some plants in a little patch of ground near the fence.

"Did you send Peter into my library?"

"No, indeed. I sent him for a wheelbarrow and some earth."

"You did not tell him to saw up some sticks?"

"No, indeed."

"Then he must be crazy. He can't work here any more."

"Why, he is the only sober man we ever had on the place. He's better than Jonas."

"H'm! Jonas wouldn't dare to saw wood in my study in spite of all my protests."

"Why, Elder, you must be dreaming. Pete would never do that."

"Oh, he wouldn't?" cried the Parson, in as impatient a tone as he could assume, being naturally very mild-tempered. "Come and see if he couldn't?"

Mrs. Richardson followed her husband to the study.

Wood, saw, buck, sawdust and everything had disappeared.

There was a spat of ink on the carpet and that was all.

"It doesn't look as if anybody had been sawing wood here."

It certainly did not and the Parson looked puzzled.

"It is very strange," he mused. "It doesn't seem possible that I could have imagined it all."

Just then Pete went by on the path trundling a wheelbarrow.

"Petel" called the Parson.

"Yas'ri" answered the coon, stopping.

"You have not been in the study, have you?" asked the lady.

"Yas, Mis' Rich'son, I was in dere jest now."

"What were you doing, Peter?"

"Sawin' some sticks up fo' de Pa'son, ma'am."

"There!" ejaculated the clergyman, greatly relieved.

"But that is not the place to saw wood, Peter."

"Know it amn't, Mis' Rich'son, but de pa'son done call me in an' tol' me fo' ter do it, an' neber ter min' a wo'd he sayed, an' I had ter do jest as he tol' me, ma'am."

The parson was thunderstruck.

"I never told you anything of the kind!" he protested.

Pete didn't want to tell the parson that he lied, but he thought so just the same.

"You probably did it in a fit of absent-mindedness, my dear," said Mrs. Richardson, "and then forgot all about it. You must not blame Peter for that."

"Yo' done tol' me ter cut up dat wood, shuah 'nuff, pa'son," declared Pete. "Ef yo' had n' I never t'ink ob takin' such liberties, I neber would."

"That will do, Pete," said the Parson. "Go and help Mrs. Richardson."

Off went the coon and the puzzled Parson remarked:

"I don't know how to account for it, but this is some of Richard's work, I am sure."

"That innocent boy!" cried Dick's mother. "Impossible! Why, he went to the store an hour ago and has not returned, and he wouldn't do such a thing if he had. You are always blaming that poor boy for something."

The Parson said nothing, but proceeded to gather his scattered thoughts so as to go on with his sermon while Dick took a stroll in the woods and set all the birds crazy by imitating the cry of a hawk and making them think their homes were in danger.

Hiram and Rastus heard about the wood sawing racket and, thinking to gain favor with the Parson, told him that they had heard Dick tell Pete to play the snap on him. They lied, not like gentlemen, but like a couple of chumps, further declaring that Dick had paid the coon a dollar for working up the job.

Their lies did not do them any good, however, for Dick's mother would not believe them, and the Parson was too busy to push the matter just then; afterward it slipped his mind.

Dick overheard the two brothers giving him away, being in his own room over the study, with the window open at the time.

"Those gillies make me tired," he remarked; "and they haven't got onto the way the thing was done, either."

He made up his mind to give those two sneaks the razzle-dazzle, and that very afternoon he did it.

Hiram was in the barn fixing a fishing rod, his back to the open door, when he heard his brother say:

"You're a pudding-headed chump, you are, Hiram, and I have a mind to break your jaw!"

Hiram turned, but saw no one.

"I'll see whether he'll break my jaw or not," he muttered.

"Ah, go on, you stuff. You're no good."

Hiram looked all around, but didn't see a soul.

Dick was right under the window outside, and he knew how to throw his voice to a nicety.

"I'll stuff you, Rastus Diggs," growled Hiram.

"You ain't man enough. I can lick you with my eyes shut."

That rattled Hiram, and he rushed out with blood in his eye.

He heard his brother's retreating footsteps, heard a chuckle, heard a stone whizz past his ear and go bang against the wall, but saw nothing.

"I'll thump that duffer in the jaw for that," he growled.

Presently, upon going towards the house, he saw Rastus lying in a hammock out on the lawn.

That was his opportunity, and he stole without being observed.

The other chump was asleep and knew nothing about it.

What he did know was finding himself suddenly flopped out of the hammock on the ground.

"Call me a pudding head chump again, will you?"

"I did not."

"You're a liar!"

Each thought the other said that, for their voices were very nearly alike.

Rastus was mad for being chucked out of the hammock, and Hiram was mad for being told he lied.

The two sneaks pitched into each other red hot and sizzling, and both got in some dandy thumps.

Dick took it all in from a corner of the house and felt very glad.

He occasionally put in a word to help the thing along, too.

"You're a mean sucker!"

"I'll punch your stupid head!"

"You're no good, you sneaks!"

Things were presently at fever heat, and both brothers got black eyes and bloody noses.

They only stopped when the parson happened to come along and caught them at it.

They were sweet looking pills for three or four days, they were, and Dick smiled grimly to himself whenever he saw them.

Neither could tell how the fun began and they would not speak to each other for two days.

The parson gave them a good long lecture on the sinfulness of fighting, and they had to swallow it, for they could not lie out of the thing, having been caught dead to rights by the old man.

They had the fun, too, of staying on the place until their eyes and noses resumed their normal appearance, and missed lots of good times in the village as a consequence.

The parson's wife was a particular sort of woman and she wasn't going to let any nephews belonging to her appear in town with discolored eyes and confused noses if she knew it.

Those two young sneaks were therefore sent to Coventry as it were, and it was a couple of days before they got at the bottom of the thing; videlicet, how the scrap originated.

Then Hiram told his version, and Rastus let out the truth on his side, the result being that they both pitched upon Dick as the cause of the disturbance.

They were too cussed mean to see that the fault lay at their own door, and that Dick was only getting back on them for their previous freshness, or, at all events, if they saw it, they would not acknowledge it, which figured up to the same thing.

They swore to get even on Dick, but that merry young fellow did not lose an ounce of flesh or a moment's sleep over it, and they duly informed him that he must expect some terrible revenge.

"Go walk on yourself," he flippantly remarked, when the message of the declaration of the vendetta was delivered, and that was all he said.

The period at which those chumps would get the best of him was about as remote as it takes a woman to sharpen a lead pencil without making chips of the whole business on the time required to honestly fill one of your patent pocket banks for dimes, fill it squarely I mean, and not by borrowing two or three dollars for a few minutes, so that you can work the combination on the thing, and get out what you have foolishly put in in a burst of over confidence in your ability to save five cases worth of coin without interfering with the vaults.

In other words the time when those gillies would get hunk with Dick in a decent way was very remote.

The best of it was they did not know how he worked his little rackets.

Hiram suspected that it had something to do with ventriloquism but Dick was such a genius, such an adept in the science, that neither Hiram nor Rastus could begin to understand his capabilities in that direction.

That young scamp Dick, was always practicing and was a Jim-dandy at it.

He could imitate any sound made by any-

thing above, below or on the earth and could put voice in a stick or a stone, a bird or a tree, and I verily believe he would have puzzled Old Nick himself.

However, we will take all that for granted and slide on with the story, for that's the thing, as Shakespeare and myself would say.

About the time that Hiram and Rastus got over their black eyes, Jonas the hired man was out behind the barn weeding out a strawberry bed or something of that sort. Suddenly he heard the Parson calling to him.

"Jonas, I say, Jonas?"

"Wall, what is it?" asked Jonas, looking up.

Every now and then he would glance up and see the Parson at the window and that would encourage him to renewed exertions.

After a while his outer shirt got too hot and sweaty for him and that was thrown aside.

At it he kept till he had a hole two feet deep and the same wide.

"Hi, Jonas," presently sang out the voice of the Parson.

"Well?" asked Jonas, resting on his spade and wiping the sweat from his forehead on the sleeve of his undershirt.

"It may be seven feet, but keep right on digging."

"Oh, it may be seven, hey?" grunted

head when he stopped, when he heard the Parson calling:

"What are you doing down there, Jonas?"

It was the Parson sure enough, this time, and not Dick.

The young scamp had been away, had come around again, and now he had once more skipped.

This time it was the Parson, and he greatly wondered to see that hole in the ground.

Jonas looked up, saw his boss, and said: "What say, Pa'son? Don't you think it's nigh on to deep enough?"

"I should say it was, but what are you digging here for?"



"Why, Parson, how you talk! You've been keeping me running putting up butter, sugar, coffee, tea, eggs, molasses, vinegar, flour, potatoes——" "I've been keeping you running? Nonsense! You wouldn't pay me any attention till just now."

He could see the Parson sitting in a window and supposed of course that it was he who had called.

"Right where you are digging there is a chest of gold hidden in the ground."

"Shucks! Yu don't say!"

"Yes. Dig it up and you can have half."

Jonas did not need a second invitation, you can bet.

He was not extra fond of work, he wasn't, but when it came to digging up chests of gold he was in it sure enough.

Away he hustled to get a pick and spade and in a few minutes he was digging away for dear life.

"Jonas?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"It's only six feet down."

"Well, I reckon that's enough," grunted Jonas, buckling down to his work again.

Out flew the earth and deeper and deeper went the hustling Jonas in his search for gold.

He started in with his coat on but this was soon flung aside as being too heavy.

It was not very long before the man's vest seemed to incommode him and that went off as well as the coat.

Jonas. "Well, I got started now and I ain't goin' to stop till I get that money." Then he went right on with his digging.

PART V.

SWEATING and grunting and hustling with the clods of earth, Jonas kept on digging out there in the strawberry bed till he had a hole five feet deep and four long.

"Woof! but it's hot work!" he muttered at length, pausing to straighten up. "Wisht I had a jug o' cider out here."

"You keep right on at your work and never you mind the cider till you get through."

Jonas could not see the window where the Parson was from the hole, but he knew that he must be there all the same.

"Wall, I'm durned! I don't see why I can't take a nip to wet my whistle," he muttered. "It's mighty dry work this is."

However, he went at it again, chucking out the spadefuls of earth till you couldn't see him at all, but could only see the mold come flying out.

He had struck down to nearly six feet, the level of the ground being above his

"Why, you know," chuckled the man, looking very mysterious.

"But I don't know, Jonas."

"Why, it's the chest of gold."

"What chest of gold?"

"What you told me about, o' course."

"That I told you about?"

"Yas, and I'm to hev half."

"I didn't tell you about any chest of gold, Jonas."

"Why, yas yer did. Yer said it was six or seven feet down, an' thet I could hev half on it."

"Nonsense! There isn't any chest of gold here. I don't want the strawberry bed dug up like that. You've ruined it."

"Hain't teched the storrbries, Pa'son, and this is jest where yer told me to dig."

"I didn't tell you to dig at all."

"I swow yer did, Pa'son. Yer was sittin' in the window on the east side, an' yer hollered to me."

"But I haven't been sitting in that window at all, and I never 'holler' to anyone."

"Wall, yer called aout ter me ter dig right here and get the chist o' gold, and I'm diggin' here all mornin'. Never worked so hard all my life."

"H'm, that won't hurt you, Jonas, but I

did not tell you to dig here, and there isn't any chest of gold. You'd better fill that hole up."

"H'm!" grunted Jonas, looking very much disgusted.

Just then along came Dick, looking as innocent as a whole flock of sheep.

"Hallo, father, going to plant trees?" he asked. "That's good rich earth, isn't it! Why don't you put in your celery plants?"

"Don't know but I will," said the parson. "I had forgotten all about them. Jonas, you can put in the celery, but you won't want the trenches all so deep as that."

Then away he went, forgetting all about the chest of gold and the inquiries that he was going to put to Dick concerning it.

"That's just like you chumps of hired men," chuckled the parson's boy. "You always do too much or not enough."

Then he also took himself away and Jonas climbed out of the grave he had made, wiped his perspiring brow and muttered.

"Somebody's been lyin' or else they's so pesky absent minded that they can't remember one thing more'n ten minutes. Now he says they ain't no chist o' gold and he wants salary put in. I'm durned if I know what tu make out."

That little bit of extra work didn't kill the hired man, after all, and it did the ground good, the berries and the celery getting the benefit of the extra stirring up of the soil.

In the afternoon Pete was out on the lawn cleaning things up, and making a good deal of fuss about it, as usual.

Dick came along, saw the coon and stood behind a tree, his mother having just come out upon the piazza.

"Peter!" sounded her rather high soprano voice.

"Yes'm," said that spare coon, looking around.

"Stand on your head!"

"Bress yo' haht, missus, I couldn't do it, nohow."

"Stand on your head, I tell you!"

"A' right, if you say so," grunted the coon, as he made the attempt.

The Parson's wife happened to turn her gaze toward the lawn to see what Pete was doing, when, very much to her surprise, she saw him with his head on the ground, trying to get his feet in the air.

"Good gracious! what is the man doing?" she exclaimed.

Flop!

Pete got his feet up, but they did not stay up more than a second.

Over he went on his back in a trice.

"Try again, that's very bad."

"Reckon it am de bes' I c'n do, missus. I neber learned circus tricks, I didn't."

"Don't talk back. Stand on your head, I tell you."

"A' right, missus, but dat am de bes' I can do."

Then he tried again, with no more success than at first.

The minute he tried to get his legs up straight, over he went like a house of cards.

"What on earth is the man trying to do?" muttered the lady.

That's the way with women; they see a thing and then ask what it is.

"Do that over again, you black'chump."

"Yes'm," stammered Peter, who had never heard his mistress talk like that before.

Then he tried again, resolved to accomplish the feat or bust.

He tried to do it quick this time so as to get a good start.

Just as he stuck his head on the ground there came a sharp summons.

"Peter!"

It came so sudden that Peter went ker-flap in a hurry, spreading himself out in the most undignified fashion.

"Peter!"

"Yes'm! I couldn't do it, I tol' yo' I knowed I couldn't fust off."

"Do what?"

"Stan' on my head," said Pete, getting up.

"Who told you that you could? Haven't you anything to do besides fooling away your time like that?"

"Yes'm, but yo' done tol' me to stan' on my head and I tol' yo' dat I couldn't do it, nohow."

"Nonsense!"

"Deed I couldn't, missus," protested Pete.

"I didn't suppose you could. What did you want to try it for, I'd like to know."

"'Cause yo' tol' me to, missus, dat's fo' why."

"I never told you anything of the kind."

"Oh, missus, I done heerd yo' just as plain as nuffin'."

"The ideal! You must be crazy. Go on with your work and don't say such foolish things."

Then she went into the house, and Pete looked decidedly puzzled.

"Don't see what am de mattah wif de folks dese days," he muttered. "Ef Mis' Rich'son, didn' tol' me fo' to stan' on my head I wouldn't said so. I ain' got no reasum to lie 'bout it."

"Chip-chip, chee-cheriee."

"Hallo, dere's a squ' up in dat yer tree. Dem's de fellers what eats de cabbages. Wondah whar he am, anyhow?"

The squirrel could be heard chirping first in one place, then in another, but Pete couldn't see him, look as he would.

As he went around the tree he came upon Dick, sitting on a bench.

"Yo' saw dat squ' Marse Dick?" he asked.

The squirrel chirped again, right over Pete's head, and the latter was looking straight at Dick.

"Dere he am now!" and up went Pete's head in the air.

"Buzz-buzz-zzz!"

"Wow! Whar dem hornets? Why yo' didn't told me dey was a nes' ob 'em somewhere?"

The frightened coon jumped back, but he couldn't see a single hornet.

"Whar am dey, Mars Dick?"

"Buzz-zzz!"

"Sounds in your hat, Pete."

"Fo' goodness sakes, so it dol" and off went the coon's straw hat in a hurry.

"Buzz-zzz!"

"Dere he goes! Golly! Wondah he didn't sting me froo de wool."

"Why didn't you catch him, Pete?" asked Dick. "You're no good."

"Yas, I is, but dat yaller jacket he flewed so fas' I couldn't saw him."

"Sss-ssss-rrr!"

That was a rattle snake right under Pete's feet, or he thought it was.

He turned the color of weak coffee in a second and shook like blazes.

"Fo' de lawd sakes kill dat rattler, Marse Dick, or I'se a gone niggah, shuah 'nuff."

"Oh, you're dreaming, Pete. There isn't any rattler around here," laughed Dick.

"Yas dey is, yas dey is, Marse Dick, 'cause I heerd him plain nuff," cried Pete, still trembling.

"Oh, you're dreaming. Pick up your hat."

Pete stooped to pick up his head gear when a warning rattle sounded right beneath it.

That coon did not stop to argue the case with the rattler under his hat.

He just turned a double back somersault, gave one terrible yell, and got out of that in short order.

"Goodness me! I don' wo'k no mo' out dere in de grass," he muttered, when he reached the house. "I ain' comf'able wif ho'nets an' rattle snakes, an' sech foolin' 'roun' me, no sah."

"Come on, Pete, he's gone," called Dick.

"No, sah, I don' hab to go dere. I's got wo'k in de bahn, an' I ain' got no time to fool wif rattlesnakes, I habn't."

"Peter!"

It was the Parson's voice, sure enough, and Pete looked toward the gate.

The worthy man was just driving in at the gate.

"Yas'r," said Pete.

"Stand on your head!"

"Well, I neber did see de likes ob de people 'roun' yer!" muttered Pete. "If I gotter stan' on my head all de time I frow up my job. Wondah what am de mattah wif all de folks, anyhow?"

"Stand on your head, I say!"

There was no gainsaying a command uttered in so peremptory a tone as that.

The Parson evidently meant business, Pete thought.

"Wull, I got de wall to hol' agin, anyhow!" he muttered, "an' maybe I do bettah dis time."

The Parson was just driving up to the

house when he saw Pete put his head on the stones, balance himself on his hands and slowly raise his legs to a vertical position.

To say that he was astonished would not half fill the bill.

Even the easy going mare that never shied, seldom ran, and wasn't frightened at anything, even Fan cocked up her ears and looked scared.

"What ails the man? Whoa, Fan, steady, girl, Richard?"

"Yes, sir," and Dick came up.

"What's Peter trying to do?"

"Stand on his head, as you told him to do, sir, but I don't think he'll succeed."

"I never told him to stand on his head, Richard," gasped the parson. "Do you think I'm insane?"

Flop.

Down went Pete, and Fan would have bolted if Dick had not caught her head.

"Dere yo' am, Pa'son," sniffed Pete, "an' dat am de las' stanin' on my head I'se gwine ter do fo' anybody."

"I should say so," muttered the parson. "Don't let me see you doing anything so foolish again," and the shepherd of the flock got out and went into the house, forgetting all about the laying out he was going to give Dick.

The next snap worthy of mention which Dick worked off, was done as described below.

One pleasant morning the Parson took Fan and the buggy and drove to the general store in the town to lay in a supply of grub wherewith to run his establishment.

Master Dick was in the store when the Parson entered, where we'll explain what followed.

The worthy man stepped up to the counter while Dick got behind a barrel.

"Twenty-five pounds of white sugar, please, in a hurry."

"All right, sir," said the clerk, beginning to hustle, for that was a big order.

The Parson concluded that he must be busy, and waited for him.

"Ten pounds of best coffee, unground," the clerk heard the Parson say, as soon as he had weighed out and tied up the sugar.

"Somebody seems to be ordering very largely," said the Parson, as the clerk hurried away.

The latter was coming back with the coffee when another order greeted his ears.

"Five pounds of tea, your very best."

"In a minute," said the clerk, looking at the Parson.

Then he put the coffee alongside the sugar and hurried away.

"Four pounds of English cheese, and be sure to have it old."

"Yes, sir, right away, sir," said the clerk as the Parson was about to call his attention.

The tea took its place with the other things and away went the clerk to cut a hunk of cheese.

"Four pounds and three ounces. Is that too much?" he asked.

"No," came the answer from the Parson's corner, "and bring one of those sides of bacon while you're at it."

That clerk just hustled, for the Parson's order was the biggest in months.

"Reckon he's had his salary raised or is expecting company," he thought.

"Fifty pounds of the best flour," was the next thing he heard, as he was coming up with the cheese and bacon.

"Yes, directly, you'll get it all in time," he said, with a very fine and large smile.

"Dear, dear, I did not suppose he would be so busy," muttered the Parson, as the clerk skipped out again. "I wonder if the other clerks are all occupied?"

He looked around to see if there was any better chance with any one else, and while he was at it his man plumped a big bag of coffee down in front of him.

"Six cans of condensed milk, the very best."

"Yes, Parson, right away," said the clerk, as the Parson turned to catch his eye.

"Really, I wonder if I can't find some one else?" sighed the patient man, as he turned around again.

"And six of those canned peas and the same of tomatoes."

"My goodness! The Parson is really laying in a stock," thought the clerk.

"And don't forget two dozen fresh eggs." This was said as the clerk was putting down the canned stuff.

The best of it was, Dick gave those orders in a tone heard perfectly by the clerk, but not by the Parson, who was a bit deaf.

The pile of stuff on the counter in front of the Parson began to grow, and he wondered how much bigger it was going to get.

"Somebody must be buying provisions for a three years' cruise," he muttered, as the clerk went away to get the eggs.

"Ten pounds of butter, while you're over there, Mr. Jones."

pausing at last before the Parson and making out a bill.

"Oh, it's all is it?" muttered the good man. "Well, I'm glad of it. I had no idea you were so busy. Will you wait on me now?"

"You'll have the things sent up, I suppose?"

"No, I'll take them with me in the buggy."

"But it won't hold them all will it? Better let us send them. Shall I charge them or will you pay now?"

"Oh, I'll pay for them. I never like to have things charged. Let me see, I want seven pounds of sugar, a pound of coffee, a small bag of flour, a—"

"Upon my word, Mr. Jones, I won't—" There was trouble brewing; in fact, it was right on the boil.

PART VI

THE proprietor of that big general store was a member of the church, although he was not one of the Parson's flock.

Mr. Jones was also a member in good standing.

The other clerks present could answer guilty to the same count.

For all that they were not going to stand there and hear themselves called liars, if they knew it.

Mr. Richardson was a good man and a



"There!" cried the storekeeper, at the top, shaking his fist and getting very red in the face, "don't you dare to call us liars again, if you are a minister!"

"Well, he is bound to get enough, I should say," chuckled the clerk.

He had not made such a sale since going into the store.

If he made many more like that, he would ask for a raise of salary.

"A gallon of molasses, please."

"All right," and the man dumped the butter down.

"Can't you wait on me pretty soon?" asked the poor Parson, as the man hurried away.

"Certainly, certainly, just as fast as you give me the order," answered the clerk.

"And a quart of vinegar."

"That's funny. I thought he made his own."

"And a bushel of potatoes."

"All right, Mr. Richardson, Give me a little time."

It kept going that way for ten minutes. As soon as the man got anyway near the counter, he would have a new order.

Every time the Parson thought the man was ready to wait on him, the latter would suddenly hurry away.

At last there was a pile of stuff on the counter as high as a man's head.

"Is that all?" asked the smiling clerk,

"But you've ordered all those things already," said the puzzled clerk.

"I haven't ordered anything till this minute."

"Why yes you have. I've been waiting on you for the last twenty minutes."

"You've been keeping me waiting, you mean. I haven't had a chance to order anything till just now."

"Why, parson, how you talk! You've been keeping me running putting up butter, sugar, coffee, tea, eggs, molasses, vinegar, flour, potatoes—"

"I've been keeping you running? Nonsense! You wouldn't pay me any attention till just now."

The proprietor and two other clerks now came up.

The first one was getting excited.

"Yes, I have. You ordered all this stuff, and you wouldn't let me stop a second."

"Nonsense, I did not."

"If you hadn't ordered it, Mr. Richardson, it wouldn't have been put up."

"But I didn't."

"Certainly you did."

"You're a liar!"

"Really, parson, I can't—"

"You're all liars!"

minister, but he could not call them liars for nothing.

They were all agreed on that point.

"We are not liars!" snorted the boss.

"Yes, you are."

"If you don't want to take this stuff you needn't, but—"

"Go soak your head!"

That was too much for the boss of the place.

He said a few hurried words to the clerk behind the counter, and to one in front of it, and in a jiffy, before he knew what he was about, the parson felt himself rudely seized and hustled from the door.

That was not all of it, either, for he was then flying down the steps, and I am not certain that the proprietor's boot did not have something to do with it.

At any rate, the good man was fired out. Down the front steps he went, bumpetty bump, fetching up at the bottom very much shaken, and hustled.

"There!" cried the storekeeper, at the top, shaking his fist and getting very red in the face, "don't you dare to call us liars again, if you are a minister!"

Then he went in, banged the door, and began waiting on a customer.

Master Dick skipped out by the back door, not caring to be seen either by his father or the storekeeper just then.

One or the other might have suspected him, although neither could have given very clear reasons for their suspicions.

Dick went off to find fun in some other quarter, therefore, and the Parson picked himself up, feeling very much ruffled and decidedly indignant at the treatment he had received.

He did not ask for any explanation, but went off to a rival establishment and bought what he required, while the clerks in the big store amused themselves by putting back the stuff that littered the counter.

The Parson declared that he would never trade at that store again, and he did not do so for several days, until his wife, not knowing of the disturbance, called in to make some purchases.

The boss was rather short to her, and she went away in a huff and complained to the Parson, who by this time had forgotten all about the hustling he had received.

He complained to the boss, and the latter reminded him of the incident of a few days previous.

"Ah, yes, to be sure, I do remember something about that," said the Parson, "but as you were in the wrong, I do not see why you can take the stand you do."

"I am in the wrong?" repeated the other. "Why, you ordered a lot of things, refused to take them, and called us all liars."

The Parson's surprise was fully expressed in his face.

"Why no, I didn't. I don't know who ordered the things, but I didn't. What could I do with all that stuff? So far from calling anyone liars I was denominated one myself, and then rudely ejected from the store, I, a clergyman, and I had scarcely spoken ten words and could not get any attention."

"It's very funny," said the other. "Mr. Jones said you kept him running from one part of the store to the other putting up orders and giving him no time to breathe."

"Really, I did nothing of the sort," gasped the Parson. "I thought Mr. Jones was disengaged and went to give him my order when he began flying around, piling great quantities of all sorts of things on the counter and constantly telling me to wait a moment and not be in a hurry, and at last asking me if I wanted that wagon load of things sent to the house, when I had not had a chance to order a single article."

The boss was not excited now, and he could look at the matter quietly, but he could not make it out for all that.

He could not doubt the Parson's word, but neither could he question the evidence of his own ears and there he was, up a stump.

"Was my son, Richard, anywhere around at that time?" asked the Parson, at length.

"No he wasn't, but what has that to do with it?"

"I don't know," said the Parson, meditatively. "I wish I did. I am afraid Richard is mischievous."

"What? that innocent boy!" cried the store-keeper. "Why, he isn't mischievous. It's his cousins who make all the trouble."

"I don't know," said the Parson. "My wife says the same thing, but I can't quite understand it and I don't know why I don't."

Friendly relations were once more established between the church and trade, but the little affair of the bouncing was never really explained for all that.

Dick continued to enjoy himself and nobody had yet tumbled to his little game nor did they seem likely to do so.

It was all in the merry month of May and the summer was on full tap, notwithstanding the calendar, the trees being in full trim and everything growing like mad, Dick's spirits being on a level with everything else when the following circumstances took place.

To start with, there was a sewing circle at the parsonage.

For the benefit of the uninitiated, I will state that a sewing circle is a gathering of old maids, confirmed gossips, married women of a talky disposition and a very few sensible girls, drawn together for the

ostensible purpose of making undergarments and hemstitched handkerchiefs for the heathen in foreign lands.

That is what the old girls are supposed to go there for, but the real reason is so that they can swap recipes for making indigestible cake and unpalatable pies, gossip about those that are not present, and do some of their own neglected sewing.

There was such a convocation at the parsonage, and Mrs. Richardson was the chief offender.

Dick was barred out, of course, although he would be let in at supper time and be allowed to sit in the parlor afterward along with the men folks who came after their wives.

Nothing but steel walls and spring guns could keep that young fellow out, however, and he managed to get as much fun out of the thing as anybody.

The room where the old hens did their cackling overlooked the garden and, the weather being mild, the windows were left open.

That was enough for Master Dick and, when he came home from school he ensconced himself behind a big lilac bush right alongside one of the windows.

As a starter he whistled like a canary in a manner to fool that sweet singer himself.

"Oh, just hear that bird!" gurgled a giddy young thing of forty-four. "I do so love birds."

"Quail on toast, you mean," said another woman, apparently an old girl near the window.

Then the canary bird drowned all other sounds, or some unpleasant remarks might have been heard.

In a few minutes a crow was heard uttering his melodious but somewhat hoarse notes just outside the window.

"Dear me, hear that crow," said the old gal by the window.

"You're an old crow yourself," the forty-fourer seemed to say.

"Really, Miss Fizzig, I can't allow you to make such remarks."

"Ah, shut up, both of you," the quiet Mrs. Richardson seemed to interrupt.

The two ladies looked surprised, but said nothing.

Then a parrot's voice outside remarked shrilly:

"Ah, there, girls, how goes it?"

"Where is that horrid parrot?" asked Miss Fizzig.

"He's very disagreeable," added Mrs. Fuzztopp.

"Why, we haven't any parrot," said the hostess.

"Come here, yu durned Poll, I've got yu naow."

That was Jonas outside the window.

Then there was a flutter of wings, the yells of a frantic man and the sharp scolding of a parrot.

Dick did the whole business, but it was so natural that the women all ran to the window to see the fuss.

Nobody was in sight and they all concluded that the man had taken the captured bird away.

"Good-by, girls, see you later," called the parrot from around the corner.

The belief that a parrot had uttered the uncomplimentary remarks they had heard, acted like a balm upon the ruffled feelings of the ladies, and they resumed work with smiling faces.

Presently, however, there came another interruption, and a most startling one.

"Squeak!"

"Oh—waa! look at that mouse!"

"He's right under your chair!"

"Ow! kill him—kill him!"

"Squeak!"

The squeaks and the three different voices were all done by Dick.

The old girls were scared out of their wits, however.

Such a hustling and scrambling you never saw.

Dick would like to have seen it, but he enjoyed it all the same.

You never saw such a gathering up of skirts, or such a scrambling to get upon chairs, sofas and tables. Maybe you don't know what a panic one poor little inoffensive mouse can create among a lot of big, able-bodied women.

There was a first-class low barometer,

high temperature cyclone in that room in two shakes.

"Wow! there he is!"

"He's climbing up your dress!"

"Oh, Lord! take him off!"

That rascal Dick only added to the confusion, for the women made noise enough in all conscience.

Miss Fizzig jumped on the piano stool, and it immediately whirled around and deposited her in Mrs. Fuzztopp's lap.

The latter lady was sitting on the arm of a big rocking-chair, her feet drawn up under her.

When the old maid sat on her there was a smash up.

Over went both women, chair and all, and such a screaming you never heard.

If there had really been a mouse in the room, he would have been scared to death.

It took ten minutes to get those badly rattled women quiet, and the mouse failed to materialize after all.

Nobody knew who had started the scare, for everybody accused everybody else of doing it.

"I don't believe there was any mouse in the first place," declared Miss Fizzig.

"You hollered first, you old fraud!" came from the corner where Mrs. Cottonsox sat.

"You shut up, or you'll get fired."

Dick knew that both women were glaring savagely at each other, although he could not see them.

Rap-rap-rap-rap!

That was a loud rap on the door.

"Who's that I wonder?"

"Come in."

Nobody came in, however, and the hostess went to the door.

No one was there and a laugh was heard out in the hall.

"It's that bad boy of yours at his tricks," came from Miss Fizzig's particular corner.

"My boy, indeed!" snapped Mrs. Richardson. "That innocent child never plays tricks."

"Ah, go West! He's the worst boy in town."

"Really, Mrs. Fuzztopp, I can't allow you to say such things of my son."

"Why, I haven't said a word."

"Yes, you have, you old guy," was Miss Fizzig's apparent observation.

"Lorinda Fizzig, I'll trouble you to keep your remarks to yourself."

"I never said a word to you."

"You did so, you old rag bag," came from Mrs. Cottonsox.

"Oh, oh!" remarked several others.

"Ladies, I am astonished," said the hostess. "I never heard such language."

"No, but the Parson has, you bet."

The remark came from a corner where there were a dozen or more women, but nobody seemed to know who had said it.

"You're all a lot of jays," was the next remark, evidently from the lips of Mrs. Richardson.

Then all hands began to talk, all at once, and Dick did the canary bird act again and shut them all up.

After that he skipped out, not caring to bust up the whole business, as he certainly would have done if he had remained there much longer.

There was not that fresh effusiveness and general feeling of good nature prevailing among the ladies after he went away, however, as had been noticed before he came.

There was less talking, too, but there was more work done, so perhaps it was just as well that the young scamp had been around.

It was not very many days after this that Dick was down in the village on an errand primarily, but on the lookout for fun just as much.

It had rained like all possessed the night before and the road at a point near the post office had been gulched out to a depth of three or four feet and five or six long.

The place had been temporarily covered with boards until it could be filled in, so as to prevent accidents.

When Dick reached the place a moon-faced Chinamen was just coming along with a big basket on his arm.

The Mongolians had invaded that quiet village as well as everywhere else and there were already two Chinese laundrys

in the place, one at each end of the main street.

As Slim Jim was passing the break in the road he suddenly heard himself addressed.

"Hi-ya, Jimmee, you helpee me."

The heathen paused very much astonished and looked around.

Nobody was in sight but a boy sitting on a hitching post a few yards distant.

"Hi-hi, no lookie, come helpee."

"Where be?" asked Slim Jim.

"Down holee. Pullee lout."

"How you gettee?"

"Fallee lin. Man covee lup."

"No can gettee lout?"

"Nopee, bleakee leg."

"Hullee up, Jimmee, me gettee all blokee up."

The voice came from the hole if it came from anywhere.

"Why, goodness me, so there is," said the village dignitary. "He must be got out."

"You takee hold, we gettee out," suggested Slim Jim.

That did not meet the approval of the local magnate, however.

"What? I take hold of a plank to relieve a Chinaman? No, sir. Here, boy, take hold here and help this man."

"Take hold yourself, you old fraud. You ain't too good."

The voice seemed to come from behind,

er, and get it out of the way. What are you sitting there for, boy? Get to work."

"Big man talkee too muchee, gotee big lip, allee same niggee."

That sort of broke the local boss up, and he turned savagely on Slim Jim who was lifting a plank.

"How dare you address me like that, you wretched Chinaman? I'll have you put out of the town!"

"Ah! go sit on a tack!"

Somebody in the crowd must have said that, but nobody knew who it was.

The big gun got very red in the face, and then began bossing again.

However, by this time enough planks



As he passed the tree where the Parson sat reading, and about ten feet from it, he heard a most singular order given. He could scarcely believe his ears, and he looked at the Parson in surprise.

By this time Slim Jim was very much excited.

He put his basket down on the ground, went over to the break and tried to look between the boards.

"Hully up, no takee so muchee time," said the Chinaman in the hole.

You would have sworn that there was one down there if you had been present.

"No gettee lattled, me savee you," said Slim Jim.

Then he began pulling away the boards, though this was no fool of a job.

They were heavy, being regular planks, in fact, and there were two layers of them.

"Hully up, you no goodee."

"You keepee shirtee on, me gettee you lout."

Then Slim Jim grabbed one of the planks and gave it a yank.

He had hauled it away, when along came one of the big guns of the place.

"Here, you, what are you doing with those planks?" he demanded.

"Man fallee down, me gettee out," said Jim Sling.

"Man fall down, eh? Nonsense."

"Nopee, man fallee down sewee, me tellee you."

and certainly Dick had not opened his mouth.

The high and mighty citizen turned and saw an ordinary working man looking at the Chinaman.

It was he who had used those uncomplimentary words.

"How dare you speak to me like that, you clodhopper?"

"Like what? I never said nothing."

"Don't lie to me, sir, I heard you."

"Heard what? I ain't said nothing."

"Cheesee talkee, getee me out," cried the voice in the hole.

Two or three more men had come up by this time and all wanted to know what was the matter.

"Chinaman fallee down hole. Me wantee gettee out, him bleakee leg, no can do hese," explained Slim Jim.

Then the crowd took hold and began to pull away the planks.

The village big gun did not soil his cotton gloves with any such menial work, you bet.

He bossed the job, however, and ordered everybody around as if he owned them.

"Here, Perkins, get away, let Hotchkiss do that, take hold of that little one, Wheel-

had been taken away to allow of seeing into the washout.

"Where are you, John?"

"I don't see nobody."

"Why don't you say something?"

"Maybe he's dead."

Then the village wiseacre put in his oar again.

"Here, stand aside," he said. "If the man is dead he must not be troubled till the coroner arrives. That's the law. Go away, all of you."

"Ah, go bag your head, you gilly."

Could it be possible that any one would dare speak to one of the selectmen like that?

It hardly seemed so and yet the words were spoken plainly enough.

The conceited old duffer looked mad and angrily asked:

"Who dared to tell me to shut up? I won't have it, I won't be insulted like that."

"No fightee, gettee man outee holee," said Slim Jim.

"Don't you dare do another thing till the coroner comes," snorted old Windbag, for that wasn't his name. "The man is dead."

"So had you ought to be."

The old stuff could not tell who said that, and he went away boiling with indignation.

"Come, on, fellows, let's get him out," said Perkins. "That's all stuff about having to wait for the coroner. The man might die if we did that."

Then all hands took away the remaining planks.

The hole was laid bare, and their wasn't a soul to be seen in it.

"Hi—ya, goodse jokee, me foollee Melican man. Evlybody heap big stuffee."

It could not have been anybody but Slim Jim who said that, although he was looking into the hole with the most intense surprise pictured on his pudding face.

"Hi—ya, allee big slob, me foollee."

Even Slim Jim was fooled, but he thought it was another Chinaman.

The crowd thought otherwise, and in the words of Truthful James "they went for that heathen Chineese."

PART VII.

IT was not any fun, after having sweated and fumed and hauled a lot of planks off of a hole in the road on a hot day to save a supposed Chinaman, to have the fellow that had given the alarm turn around and chuckle about having fooled the boys.

Not only was it no fun, but the gang resented it as an insult.

Slim Jim had called them all chumps and stuffs, in addition to laughing at them.

That is to say, the crowd thought he had, but it was Master Dick with his ventriloquism who had made all the fuss.

However, the crowd thought it was the Chinaman and they went for him.

They smashed his hat over his eyes.

They pulled his pig-tail till he yelled murder.

They kicked his basket of clothes into the hole they had uncovered.

They punched him in the eye and made his nose bleed.

Then they left him feeling very much broken up.

Dick had gone away before this, having had all the fun he wanted.

That Chinaman had stuck the Parson with a bad half dollar two or three days before, and had sworn black and blue that he hadn't.

Dick knew very well that he had, and this was his way of gettingsquare.

The Chinaman recovered his basket and then went off and swore out warrants against Si Perkins, Bill Wheeler, Josh Hotchkiss, Ned Newton and four or five others for assault.

He knew a thing or two, you bet, even if he was a heathen and uncivilized.

Those mad villagers were all arrested, every one of them, and the case was heard by Squire Muddle, Judge Windbag refusing to have anything to do with it because the men had insulted him.

The assault was clearly proven, and the gang was fined a dollar apiece and costs, which was cheap enough for the fun they had had.

However, they raked up an old statute, never repealed, making it an offense to use bad language on the streets, and hauled Slim Jim up on that charge.

The wily heathen paid his fine with a shady dollar and then skipped the town, having had quite enough of it, and all hands were well satisfied.

Nobody tumbled to Dick's part of the affair, and the real explanation would have surprised everybody.

Master Dick was not the fellow to give himself away, for he could have no fun after that, and having fun was one of his principal objects in life.

A few days after the racket with the Chinaman, the Parson's Boy got Sadie, the hired girl, on a string, and had fun enough out of it to last him a week.

Sadie was in the back kitchen doing the washing, when along came Dick and spotted her through an open window.

Sadie didn't see him, for she had her head down and was knocking the grease out of one of the Parson's shirts on a scrubbing board.

"You're no good, you ain't, Sarah," the girl heard Jonas say just outside the door.

"I'm as good as you are anyway," retorted Sadie, going on with her work.

"No, you ain't, and Mis' Rich'son only keeps you because you're so homely."

"Go along with you," snorted Sadie.

"No man wants to flirt with a homely girl. The missus is safe when you're around."

"Go on about your business or I'll scald you!" snapped Sadie.

"If I was as homely as you I'd go and die right away."

"You mind your own affairs," snarled Sadie, getting mad.

"You ain't worth your grub anyhow."

Sadie grabbed up a broom and dashed outside, intending to make it warm for Jonas.

When she got there she couldn't see a sign of the man.

"Ha—ha! you ain't quick enough!"

She could hear his retreating footsteps, but she couldn't see him.

"Ha—ha! no good!" came floating from around the corner of the house.

"You'll see if I'm no good or not, if I catch you around here, Mr. Jonas," muttered that angry slavey, as she returned to her work.

"Sarah eats soap!" declared a voice in the doorway.

A cake of that commodity went flying through the door and hit the pump ten feet away.

"My name isn't Sarah, if you please," snapped the disgusted domestic, "and I'll let you know it if you come fooling around me."

"Ha! you're no good for hittin' nothin', you ain't. Go take lessons."

The voice came through the window near where Dick was standing.

Sarah chucked a dipperful of water at the supposed Jonas, and Dick narrowly escaped getting a ducking.

However, an inch of a miss is as good as anything, and so long as he didn't get hit Master Dick cared nothing for the narrowness of his escape.

"Missed again; you're no good," cried the phantom Jonas from the other side of the kitchen.

"I won't miss you the next time, you clumsy beast," snorted Sadie.

She did not, for a fact.

It chanced shortly after this that the real Jonas, who had been working half a mile away, came up to the house for further orders.

He was hot and dry and wanted a wetting as he expressed it.

He got it.

Utterly unconscious of the larks perpetrated by Dick in his name and voice, he approached the kitchen door with no thought of impending danger.

Sadie heard his footsteps, and darting a quick glance through the open door, saw who it was.

Thenshe bent over the tub and filled a big dish pan chock full of soapy water.

The moment that Jonas passed the threshold he got it hot and strong.

"Just want a drop o' water tew—"

Swash!

He got his drop, and took one at the same time.

The water went all over him and he sat down so suddenly that his hat flew off.

"Gosh all hairpins! What's the matter with you?" he gasped.

"Oh, I'm no good, am I?" and Sadie grabbed up a lot of wet linen.

"Who said you wasn't?"

"You did."

"No, I never."

"Yes, you did."

"Yulie, gol durn yu."

Dick was still around taking in the circus.

That was enough for Sadie, the last remark.

Swish!

Jonas got a swipe over the ear with a lot of wet clothes just as he was getting up which nearly staggered him.

"Don't you tell me I lie, you loafer!"

"I never did. Hold on, hold on, what yu 'baout?"

Sadie was chucking water over him again.

Out he went in a jiffy, concluding that it was safer outside than in just then.

Dick also hid himself away, having had fun enough for one while.

"What's the matter with yew, anyhow?" asked Jonas, at a safe distance, as Sadie came to the door.

"I'll show you what's the matter with me, you great clumsy gawk, if you come into this kitchen."

"What in time's the matter, anyhow? Be yu crazy or what?"

"Never you mind what I am, but if you come fooling around here and giving me any more sass, you'll catch it, that's what you will."

"Who's been givin' yu any sass?"

"You have?"

"Huh! I hain't been here for an hour."

"You needn't try to lie out of it, you shiftless clown. Didn't I hear you saying all sorts of things for the last half hour about me. I'm no good, am I? Well, I'm too good for you, I reckon, you lazy good-for-nothing coote."

"Who said yu was no good?"

"You did, a dozen times."

"Oh!"

"You can say 'oh!' as much you like, but I guess I ain't deaf. I heard you and you can't deny it. Just keep out of here, that's all. I hain't got no time to bother with you, but if you come in here I'll take it and give you another such a scalding that you won't forget in a hurry."

Then she went back to her work, leaving Jonas very much perplexed.

"Durn me if I kin tell what ails the gal," he muttered. "Guess she's looney. Hain't said nuthin' to her all mornin', and hain't been here nuther, and the fust thing she doos is to throw a bucket o' water on me. Blamed if I don't think she's cracked."

He took good care not to go in or near the kitchen after that, for fear of getting a worse dose than before from that irate hired girl.

That was not all the fun that that bad boy Dick had that day, by a good deal.

Later in the day he had some more and I'll tell you all about it.

The Parson was sitting out on the lawn under a tree, reading a book in which he was greatly absorbed.

Being somewhat deaf, besides absent-minded when engaged in any literary occupation, he was entirely oblivious to anything and everything about him.

The house might burn up, and, unless a cinder happened to fall upon his book, he would never know a thing about it.

Even then, I am inclined to think, from what I know about him, that he would simply brush the cinder off and go on with his reading without even looking up.

With such a man as that to deal with, there was lots of fun to be had if you went at it in the right way.

While the Parson was deep in his book, along came Pete.

That lanky coon had nothing particular to do just then and he was in no hurry to do it either.

Master Dick was in a hammock on the piazza, presumably asleep.

"If'm, Peter, what are you doing?"

Peter was doing nothing, but it would never do to say that.

"Just been fixin' roun' de garden, sah, pullin' up weeds."

"Go and get a ladder, Peter."

"Yas'r, dreckly, sah," muttered Pete, sauntering off as though he had all the afternoon before him.

"And don't slouch so, you black rascal. Hurry up."

"My gracious me!" ejaculated Pete, accelerating his steps, "de boss get mo' an' mo' cranky eve'y day. He mus' hab eyes in de back ob his head, or a lookin' glass in de book."

Away went Pete, returning in five minutes with a ladder.

"Here yo' am, sah. Wha' yo' wan' me to do now, sah?"

"Put it up to that peach tree and go to the top."

"Yas'r," and Pete fixed the ladder and began climbing up slowly and steadily.

"Tell me how fast the apples are growin', Peter."

"Yo' mean de peaches, don' yo', sah?" muttered Pete.

"No, I don't."

"Dey ain' no apples on a peach tree, sah."

"Well, stand there and watch them grow."

"Wull! If de boss ain' clean off him base. Stan' heah an' watch de peaches grow! Nobody kin do dat."

"Don't you give me no back talk or I'll jump on you."

"De idee ob de Pa'son talkin' like o' dat. I'se very much sprised, I is. Wondah wha' de mattah wif um."

"Now come down."

Pete was glad enough to do that, for he could see no sense in his present occupation.

He started to descend, but had taken only a step or two before he was fetched up with:

"Nonsense! You are too old to be so foolish as that."

"Dat what I tink, missus, an' I mought break my neck."

"Come down the right way then, you foolish fellow."

"De Pa'son tell me to come de oder way, missus."

"Nonsense! You misunderstood him," said the lady, going into the house.

"Never mind that old hen, Pete. Do as I tell you."

The Parson certainly must have known what he was about by this remark.

"A'right, sah," grunted Pete, continuing his acrobatic performance.

"Well, go get a spade and be quick about it."

"A'right, sah, in a minnit," and this time Pete hustled and no mistake.

When he returned with the spade the Parson apparently said:

"Go dig in those flower beds, you black rascal."

"In dem flow' beds, sah?" asked that bothered coon.

"Yes. Didn't you hear me?"

"Yas'r, but dere am seeds plants in dem beds."

"Well, I want to see how they are getting on."



"Keep it up, squirt all over me," he seemed to say. Pete obeyed orders and as the Parson got up he received another dose plumb in the waistcoat. The water spattered in all directions, and the Parson was wet from head to foot.

"Not that way, you idiot, the other way."

"Which way yo' mean, sah?" asked the puzzled coon, twisting his neck so as to look at the Parson.

"Head first, of course, you big donkey."

"Go down de laddah head fus'?"

"Certainly."

"Wha' dat fo'?"

"If you fall you won't hurt yourself."

"H'm! dat am funny," muttered Pete.

"Who's gwine ter fall, anyway?"

It was no easy matter to turn at the top of a ladder and go down head first and Pete doubted his ability to do it successfully.

"Don' b'lebe I kin do it, sah," he called out. "I'se shuah to fall."

"No back talk. Do as I tell you."

That settled it, and Pete, hanging on tightly, began going down head first.

Just then Mrs. Richardson came out upon the piazza at a point somewhat nearer than where Dick was.

"What are you doing, Peter?" she asked.

"Comin' down de laddah, missus. Can't yo' see me?"

"Don't come down that way. You'll break your neck."

"Dat's de way de Pa'son tol' me to come down, missus."

He managed to slip when he was half way down, for he wasn't up to those dodges.

He slid a couple of feet, grabbed the rounds, turned over, and then went flying feet first.

He landed on a soft spot and wasn't hurt any, though somewhat scared.

"Why didn't you do as I told you, confound you?"

"Ain' use' ter dem tricks, boss. Did yo' fink I was brunged up in a circus?"

"No sass. Take away that ladder."

"Yas'r!" and Pete obeyed with alacrity.

"And then come back. See?"

"Yas'r," grunted Pete, wondering what big fool job the Parson would set him at next.

"Neber did see de beat ob de tings dat man make me do dese days," he mused.

"Specs he am losin' him min', fo' shuah."

He returned in about ten minutes, and then heard the Parson say as he could have sworn to in any court:

"What are you loafing around here for, you black ostrich?"

"Didn' yo' tol' me to come back, sah, when I done put de laddah away?" gasped poor Pete.

Pete looked askance at the Parson, and shook his head.

"Diggin' up de seeds to see how they am gettin' on," he muttered. "Fo' Gawge, he am getting crazy by de minnit."

"None of your guff, Pete. Do as I tell you, and no back slack."

"De Pa'son am gettin' wuss an' wuss in him way ob talkin'. I wondah de con'gation don' say suffin' 'bout it," thought Pete.

Then he went off and began to dig in the beds where the newly planted seeds reposed.

He had just stuck his spade in the ground, when he heard the Parson's wife calling him.

"What are you doing there, Peter?"

He turned, but could see no one but the Parson under the tree, and Dick in the hammock fast asleep.

"Diggin' in the flow' beds, missus."

"But you'll dig up all the seeds."

"Well, de boss wan's to see how dey am growin', missus."

"Stop it, I tell you!"

"Yes, missus, but de Parson he—"

"Pete. Oh, Petel!"

This time it was the Parson's, if Pete knew one voice from another.

"Go put up that spade and get out the hose."

"Deary me, dat man jus' dribe me wil', he do," muttered Pete. "What he wan' me to do nex', I like ter know?"

Certainly Pete had not worked as he had worked that afternoon for some time.

He shouldered the spade and went off to the barn with it, grumbling all the way.

He took his time returning with the hose, too.

"Fasten it on and water the lawn," came from where the Parson sat.

"Goodness me, it rained on'y yes'day, an' now he wan' de lawn watered. Neber did see sech a man fo' makin' a po' fellah wo'k, I nebber did."

However, he had his orders, and there was nothing to do but obey them.

He made his connections, turned on the water, and began sprinkling the lawn.

The Parson paid no attention, but went right on with his reading, just as though he had not spoken.

Dick was still asleep in the hammock, or seemed to be, and Pete never noticed him as he went on giving the grass a shower bath.

As he passed the tree where the Parson sat reading, and about ten feet from it, he heard a most singular order given.

He could scarcely believe his ears, and he looked at the Parson in surprise.

Then the order was repeated in very emphatic language.

PART VIII.

WHEN Pete passed the Parson in his lawn watering rounds, he suddenly heard his employer say:

"Now, then, turn that hose on me!"

"Wha' dat, sah?" asked Pete, in unfeigned astonishment, as he paused.

"Turn that hose on me, you black block-head, I tell you! I want to cool off."

There was certainly no misunderstanding an order like that.

"Tu'n de hose on yo', sah?" asked Pete, still hesitating.

"Yes, confound your black skin, and be sudden about it!"

Enough said.

Pete obeyed the order with neatness and dispatch.

Spat!

The stream of water took the Parson midway between the belt and his chin.

Away went his book, as if it had wings.

In another instant the surprised man went over backwards, chair and all, and the water flew over his head.

"Keep it up, squirt all over me," he seemed to say.

Pete obeyed orders and as the Parson got up, he received another dose plumb in the waistcoat.

The water splattered in all directions, and the Parson was wet from head to foot.

You never saw a more astonished man in all your life.

He tried to speak, but the water splattered over his face and choked his utterances.

"Stop, stop!" he grasped, frantically waving his arms. "What are you doing?"

Master Dick slid out of that hammock and sloped from the piazza in short order.

If an investigation were ordered his father would be certain to suspect him and might ask some uncomfortable questions.

It was too bad to lose the rest of the fun, but prudence forbade his longer stay in that vicinity.

"Stop it, I say!" the Parson managed to say at last, when thoroughly drenched.

"Can't you see what you are about?"

"Yas'r, ob co'se I kin," said Pete, turning the stream elsewhere.

"Then what do you mean by turning the hose on me like that? You are getting more and more careless every day."

"I done jus' wha' yo' tol' me, sah, dat am all," said Pete, by way of explanation.

"What?"

The Parson was too much astonished to say anything else.

"Dat am all, sah."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, yo' done tol' me to tu'n de hose on yo', sah. Yo' tol' me two times."

"Impossible! I haven't said a word. I didn't know you were around."

"Scuse me, sah, but yo' been givin' me o'dabs fo' de las' half hour, an' bery ridiculous o'dabs dey was."

"What orders have you had?"

"Why, sah, fus' yo' tol' me to climb de peach tree an' see how fas' de apples was growin', an' den yo' tol' me to come down de laddah head fus', an' I mos' broke my neck."

"Why, I never said a word of the sort."

"Oh, Pa'son, how kin yo' talk like dat? I was yere all de time an' heard yo'. Den yo' tol' me to dig us de seeds to see how dey was growin' an' I done it."

"Why, you stupid fellow, I never did anything of the sort," declared the Parson.

"Really, Pete, if you don't stop drinking, I can't allow you to work around the place any longer."

"Oh, Mistah Rich'son, I clar' to goodness, hope to die, I ain' been drinkin' nuffin' an' I neber does. I'se jus' as sober dis minnit as yo' am yo'self," protested Pete.

"Then you must be going insane. Why, in the name of common sense, would I want the garden hose turned on me?"

"Yo' sayed y' wanted to get cooled off, sah. I wasn' gwine fo' to do it fust off, 'deed I wasn' Pa'son, but yo' tol' me so partic'lar fo' to do it, dat I jus' had ter, dats all."

The Parson couldn't make it out at all.

Had he been so absent minded as to order Pete to do a thing like that and yet know nothing about it?

It hardly seemed possible, and yet Pete seemed earnest enough in his declaration.

At this juncture Mrs. Richardson came on the scene.

"Goodness, me, Parson, what have you been doing?" she asked. "Why, you are wet through. Did you fall into the river?"

"No, my dear. Peter has been turning the hose on me."

"Yas, Missus," interposed Pete, "but he done tell me ter."

"I should think you would have more sense," retorted the lady, with more asperity in her tone than one would think proper in a minister's wife.

"He tol' me ter, missus, an' I neber ax no questions."

"I didn't mean you, I meant your master."

"Dat's what I t'ought m'self, missus, but 's long as he tell me ter, I gotter do it."

"But I never told him anything of the sort," protested the parson, beginning to sneeze.

"Oh, missus, don' yo' blebe him?" cried Pete. "Take my oaf he did, an' he tol' me fo' to go down de tree head fus', too, an' yo' saw me doin' dat yo'self."

"Climb down a ladder head first?" repeated the Parson. "How absurd."

"Of course it is and I wonder you could give the man such an order," said the lady.

"But I didn't."

"But I saw him."

"Dear me, dear me, I can't make it out," sighed the parson. "Where is Richard? Has any one seen him?"

"Oh, yes, blame your own absent-mindedness on that poor innocent boy," snapped the mother. "Dick hasn't been around all the afternoon."

"Yas, missus, he been asleep in de hammock," said Pete. "I done see him m'self."

"Well, if he was asleep, of course he didn't have anything to do with it. How could he? You are always blaming things on that innocent boy, Parson. You'd better look at his two cousins, I think."

"Hiram and Rastus are rather wild I know," murmured the Parson, "but they have greatly improved of late."

"The idea of putting it on the innocent boy Dick," resumed Mrs. Richardson. "I'm really surprised at you. You'd better put on some dry clothes, or you'll catch cold."

The Parson thought the same, and nothing more was said about the ducking.

The good man really had no evidence against Dick, but he suspected him upon principle and from force of habit, while his mother defended him because she always had done so.

The young scamp got out of that scrape with a whole skin, as he did out of all his

rackets, but he chuckled over it to himself for the rest of the day.

The two sneaks, his cousins, were not around when the thing happened, but they pretended that they knew all about it, and told a lot of lies to the Parson, who, by that time, had forgotten all about the occurrences.

"Well, if you knew about it, you must have been just as guilty as Richard," said the Parson. "You can stay here and write me out the first four paragraphs of Caesar in English."

The two chumps did not expect that sort of thing and they could not get out of it on account of the Parsons absent mindedness either, for Mrs. Richardson heard the punishment ordered and made them do every bit of it.

They were ready to club themselves and each other when they were let out and they did have a scrap in the hall interrupted by Jonas who fired them both out-doors.

They let Dick alone after that, for a time at least, but the young fellow would have been ready for them, even if they had wanted to bother him.

He went down into the town one afternoon shortly after this, when school was out, and was standing on the steps of the big general store, when Squire Muddle drove up. The squire had an ordinary box buggy, such as is used in the country, with no top to it, and room for another seat behind if you want to stick it in.

This one had one seat only, but there was quite a little room behind.

The Squire had been making purchases, and there was a bag of meal in the tail end of the wagon, together with other purchases.

There was something else he wanted at the store, and he stopped in front of it and proceeded to get out.

He had just arisen, however, when he seemed to say:

"Git up, you brute!"

The nag thought it was his boss who spoke, and off he started.

As a consequence, the Squire suddenly resumed his seat with considerable haste.

"Get up, I say, you critter!"

The horse went faster, and the Squire got another shaking, for he had started to get up.

"Whoa! confound you!" he yelled.

The horse didn't know exactly what to make of it, but he stopped just the same.

If he could have spoken, he would probably have jawed the squire for not knowing his own mind two minutes at a time.

"Whoa!" repeated the squire.

This time the horse stopped so suddenly that old Muddle was nearly chucked over backward into the tail end of the wagon.

Then the squire started for the store, passing a couple of boys sitting on hitching posts.

He was thinking of something else and did not see them, but all the same he said, or they thought he said:

"Get in there and drive that horse around the square."

"All right," said the boys.

In they jumped without delay, and in a jiffy had started.

"Hi, squire, yure hoss has run away."

A countryman coming down the steps made this remark, apparently, and the squire turned and saw his team being run away with.

"Them's hoss thieves, Squire. Go after 'em, you ole fule."

Squire Muddle did not relish being called an old fool, but he could not stop to discuss the point now.

Off he started after his horse and cart, much to the surprise of the member of the Farmers' Alliance.

"What in time ails old Muddle noaw, I'd like tu know? Acts like he was looney."

Meanwhile, the boys were having a fine time.

"Drive faster, young fellers."

They thought, of course, that the Squire said this and they did drive faster.

"Hi-hi, hold up there, you young scoundrels!" bawled the selectman, chasing after his property.

The boys did not hear him, there being too much other noise in the street.

Away dashed Muddle, his hat flying off and exposing his bald head.

The boys never thought of looking back or they might have seen that rattled citizen chasing after them.

Squire Muddle was rather short-winded at the best, and such violent exercise did not improve matters.

He was soon completely blown, and he leaned up against a tree, gasping like a fish out of its native element.

The boys turned a corner at a gallop and Muddle gave one last despairing yell at them which they failed to hear.

"The young reprobates!" he panted. "I'll have them in the lockup before night. Everybody knows my horse and buggy,

for, and me running after 'em for, if they wasn't stealing?"

"Well, I didn't see you."

"Yes, you did. Didn't you stop to speak to me? O' course you see me, Mr. Richards?"

"Yes, but I didn't see ye then, Squire."

"Didn't see me when you spoke to me? Yes, you did."

"No, not then, but when the boys was driving."

"Oh," muttered Muddle, whose brain was in a muddle just then.

If anybody else had come along just then and had started on some other subject, the squire would have forgotten all about the

"What's that you say?"

"Didn't say nothing."

"You're a liar."

"Who's a liar? You shan't talk that way to me, if you are the Squire."

"Huh! What's that? I never said you was a liar."

"Yes, you did."

"Skip out, boys. Go around it once more."

The boys did not know what Richards and Muddle were squabbling about, but they did understand this order plainly enough.

"Get up, Sal!"

"Let her go!"



A shower of broken crockery fell on the floor. "What do you mean, sir, by such conduct? How dare you act so at my table?"

and I'll have 'em ketched before they know where they be."

At this moment half the police force of the town came along, and the squire stopped it to ask it some questions.

"You see them boys running off with my horse and wagon, Mr. Richards?" he asked.

"I see 'em, yes," answered the constable.

"You knowed all about it, didn't ye?"

"Of course I know all about it. Didn't I see 'em running away and didn't I try to stop 'em?"

"Oh, they did run away with it, did they? I thought it was all right. You know 'em, don't ye?"

"No, I don't. Why didn't you stop 'em?" gasped Muddle.

"I didn't know they was stealin' anything."

"Well, you call a horse and wagon something, don't you?"

"Of course."

"Well, then, what made you say you didn't think they was stealin' anything? Guess that's something, ain't it?"

"Well, I didn't know they was stealin'."

"What you s'pose they was going so fast

boys and his team, he was that absent-minded.

"Well, hadn't you better do something about it, if the young scamps have run off with yer team?" asked Richards.

"Well, I guess I better had, and I guess I'm going to. You're an officer of the law, and I command you to arrest the young villains."

"Can't do it without a warrant, Square. Will have to go back to the post-office."

"If'n I so we will," grunted the Squire, and away started the two of them.

Meanwhile the boys were driving around the square as they had been told to do.

When Muddle and the half of the police force reached the store, the boys had just completed the circuit.

Dick was still lounging on the steps, looking out for fun.

"There they are now, Mr. Richards, and there's my team. Lock 'em all up."

"Lock up the team, too?"

"Lock the team up? No, you old fossil."

"Who said anything about locking the team up, Square?"

"You did."

"No, I didn't, you old fossil."

Off they dashed, right in front of the astonished Squire.

"Whoa! Stop 'im! Hallo there!"

"Get up, I tell you!"

The old nag heard that and off he went at a gallop.

However, he couldn't keep up that sort of pace long.

Around the corner came a farmer with a drove of pigs.

There must be a collision if the boys tried to drive through the collection of squealing porkers.

Consequently they had to haul up at one side of the road.

That gave the Squire and the constable a chance to come up with them.

Dick had had enough out of that snap and he let it drop.

"What do you mean, you young scoundrels, by running off with my team like that? Mr. Richards, arrest 'em."

"Why, you told me to jump in and drive around the square."

"And just now you told us to do it over again."

"What! Tell you to drive my horse around the square?"

"Yes, you did."

"And told us to drive fast, too."
 "Guess you must have forgotten it, Square," said Richards. "I know them boys. They wouldn't steal nothing."
 "Of course we wouldn't, and the Squire did tell us to drive around the square."
 "Yes, and you heard him tell us to do it again."

"That's so, Square, I did, sure enough, and that's the time you called me a liar."

"Never did nothing of the sort, and never told them boys to drive my team."

"Oh, Squire Muddle!"

"We both heard you."

"Yes, and so did I."

The Squire scratched his head and then remarked:

"Well, maybe I did, but I don't remember. I want that team now, anyhow, so you'd better get out. You've sweated my horse dreadful."

The boys tumbled out and the Squire climbed in and then drove towards home, forgetting all about what had brought him to the village.

"He's a regular old woman," muttered the constable, "and if he wasn't a big gun in town he wouldn't call me a liar for nothing I can tell you."

"I wish he'd let us have another ride like that," said one of the boys. "We had a dandy time."

"Yes, but he's half cracked, I think."

"Never mind if he's all cracked if he let's us take his horse."

The Squire's wife thought he certainly was cracked when he returned home without the things he had set out to buy, and with the bag of meal so jolted and banged about that a quarter of its substance was lost.

"Well, if you don't beat all!" she declared. "Next time I'll go to the store myself. You can't remember a thing."

"The store?" muttered the muddled Squire. "Why, yes, to be sure I was going to the store, wasn't I? I declare, I must have got talking to somebody and forgot all about it. Wonder who it was?"

He had clean forgotten about the runaways and he could not have sworn to seeing Dick Richardson in town any more than anything else, and that's where the Parson's Boy was safe, for nobody suspected the part he had taken in the little circus.

PART IX.

OUR young friend Dick did not cotton to those two chumps of cousins of his for just the least bit.

They were sneaks and duffers and tell-tales and snoozers, and everything else, and Dick was getting tired of them.

He didn't care about the tricks they tried to play on him, because he could euchre them there every time, but they lied and sneaked and spied and he had no use for that sort.

"They worry pop, too, and nobody likes 'em anyhow," mused Dick, after catching Hiram and Rastus at some of their sneaking games, "and I think that the best thing to do with them is to give them the grand bounce."

Even after Dick had come to this decision and before he could put his plans in action, those two stuffs got in another of their tricks.

Jonas, the hired man, used to go off and see his girl at the other end of the town every Sunday evening, starting just after doing up the chores.

Lots of families in the country have only two meals on Sunday, to wit, a rather late breakfast, and a combination supper and dinner somewhere between four and five.

If a fellow gets hungry between times, and I never knew a boy who did not, he is sometimes permitted to make incursions on the pantry, buttery, milk-room or whatever else it may be called, and fill up on snacks of cold pie, doughnuts, election cake and such like indigestible stuff.

As soon as Jonas had eaten his supper on Sundays, he would hustle through the duties known by the general and very comprehensive title of chores, get on his best logs, and hurry off to see his spoon.

On this particular Sunday the two cousins, Hiram and Rastus, put up a mean job on the hayseeder.

Supper was late, and there was more to

be done than usual after it was over, and Jonas was just hustling.

He finished his job of milking, feeding the horse, getting out the wood for the morning, drawing water for Sadie, feeding the pigs, taking salt to the calves, burning out a hornet's nest that had been built too near to the house, cutting up kindlings, cleaning out the oven, blacking the Parson's boots, washing the wagon, cleaning out the stable, setting three hens, collecting eggs, churning and a few other trifles, and then bounced up-stairs to brush up for the evening's campaign.

First he put on a boiled shirt and a choker collar, tied a gorgeous cravat around his neck, hauled on a pair of checked trousers, donned a white vest, and then proceeded to get into his Sunday boots, which had been greased till you could see your face in them.

Here is where the mean job put up by those chumps came sneaking in.

Those boots were half filled with grease. Jonas dove his foot into the right one, grabbed hold of the straps and gave them a jerk.

Squash!

The grease squirted out and four or five big gobs fell upon his shirt front, his giddy vest, his gorgeous tie and his stunning breeches.

"Gee whizz! What in time is that?" he yelled.

Then he grabbed the other boot and looked at it.

"Goldurn the pesky skunk, tu everlasting tarnation blazes what done thet, dad-burn him, the gosh hanged sneak!" he muttered, giving the boot a toss across the room.

The grease splattered over everything, of course, and then the boot went flying out of the window after having first shattered a pane of glass.

Then that mad countryman hauled off the first boot, and went down-stairs to enter a complaint.

He found the Parson just starting off, having an appointment in Howlingburg that evening.

"Look here, Parson, this here jokin' has got ter stop, durn me if it ain't," he began.

"Why, Jonas, what's the matter?" asked the good man in surprise. "You seem excited."

"Wall, gosh blast it, so would yu be if some darned skunk filled yu're butes with soap grease, and it went kerslosh all over yer dickey, and yer pants, and yer neckties, b'gosh."

"Well, but, Jonas, you surely don't accuse me of doing anything of this sort?"

"No, 'course not, but yu kin stop it, an' I want yu tu. Now I gotter clean up, and it's late anyhow, and it'll be dark afore I gets tu 'Mandy's haouse and it's tu darned mean, but by gosh, if I ketch the feller what done this I'll lambaste him in the ear, by gosh I will."

"Really Jonas, I must not allow you to use such strong language, particularly on the Sabbath. It is certainly a shame that you have been imposed upon, and there is altogether too much mischief going on in the house. I have noticed it myself. Where is Richard?"

"Tain't Dick what done it," growled Jonas. "Dick's a teaser, but he ain't mean. No, sir, it's them durned white-livered sneakin' city cousins of his'n, that's who it is, and if I get hold of 'em I'll break their goldurned necks, goldurn 'em to goldurnation."

"Jonas, Jonas, really I cannot allow you to talk like that. It sounds very much like profanity."

"Maybe it does, Parson, but I can't help it, I'm so cussin' mad. Hallo, there's them skunks naow."

The brothers Diggs hove in sight this minute, entering the yard by the front gate.

"Young gentlemen," said the Parson, sternly, "what do you mean by playing such a dastardly trick on Jonas? Aren't you ashamed of yourselves?"

"Never played no trick on him, blustered Hiram. "We only just got home from meeting."

"From meetin', hey?" snorted Jonas. "You was in tu supper, cause I see you."

"Well, we went to meeting after that," said Rastus. "There was a temperance meeting down in the village."

"Didn't you fill my butes with soap grease, gol durn yu!"

"No, we didn't," said both.

"Who was it then?"

"It was Dick. He wanted us to help him but we wouldn't."

Dick's mother was not around to defend her innocent boy, and the Parson believed the lies that the two chumps told about him.

Jonas did not, however, and he would have thrashed the two brothers then and there, if the Parson had not interfered.

When Dick showed up, having been to see his girl, he got a laying out from the Parson and was told that he would end up on the gallows, that he would never amount to anything and that some terrible fate was in store for him if he did not mend his ways.

I am not sure that the Parson did not predict that he would become a walking delegate, a congressman or even president if he did not do better, but at any rate he gave the boy a fine old dressing down.

Dick did not say anything till the old gentlemen began to run down and then he asked the nature of the offense with which he was charged.

The Parson told him and Dick looked thoughtful.

"I didn't do it, sir," was all he said, for he wasn't a sneak and would not tell on any one else.

The Parson was proceeding to give him another lecture, looking him straight in the face when the voice of Pete was heard outside:

"Come yer, sah, quick, de sorrel mare done swaller de churn."

Now the worthy man thought a good deal of that mare of his and if any accident had befallen her he would have gone wild.

"Wait a moment, Richard, I must see what is the trouble with Fan," he hurriedly exclaimed, and then dashed out of the room.

Master Dick made his exit by another door at the same time.

The Parson found neither Pete nor the mare, one being in the colored church a mile away and the other in the stable, and, returning to the study he did not find Dick.

"It's time I got square on those two hoodoos," the hero of this tale remarked to himself as he retired for the night, "and the sooner the better."

In fact he worked his little racket the next morning at the breakfast table.

The Parson had forgotten about the fracas of the night before, and Mrs. Richardson knew nothing of it anyhow, and it was not therefore made a subject of conversation.

The breakfast was proceeding quietly, the Parson reading a letter, Mrs. Richardson pouring coffee, and Dick, sitting opposite his cousins, was struggling with a bone when the Parson said to Hiram:

"That plate of yours is nicked. It's no good. Smash it against the wall."

"Why, Parson!" exclaimed Mrs. Richardson.

"Do as I tell you, sir, and don't mind the women."

"All right," said Hiram.

Smash!

Crash!

The plate flew across the room, banged against the wall and went to pieces in a jiffy.

The Parson looked up from his letter very much astonished.

"Rastus, smash that cup of yours. It's no good."

"Why, Mr. Richardson,—Parson, my dear—you must be—"

"Do as I tell you at once, sir."

Rastus didn't wait for any more commands.

He sent his cup flying after Hiram's plate and it met with a similar fate.

Bang!

Crash!

A shower of broken crockery fell on the floor.

The Parson looked indignantly at Hiram and Rastus.

"What do you mean, sir, by such conduct? How dare you act so at my table?"

"You told us to do it."

"I told you to do it? Nonsense."

"Yes, you did, you old liar," sounded in Hiram's voice.

The Parson was furious, and so was his wife.

The only cool one in the lot was Dick.

"How dare you call me a liar?"

"I didn't," blubbered Hiram.

"Yes, you did, you chump," was the retort in the tones of Rastus.

"Don't you call me a chump, Rastus Diggs."

"I never did."

"You're a liar."

"So are you."

Then came a fracas.

The two brothers got up and began to thump each other.

Thump!

Plunk!

Whack!

"I'll bust your snoot."

At it went the two sneaks worse than ever.

Hiram had a black eye, a bloody nose and a cut on the cheek.

Rastus lost two teeth, had a swollen lip, and a black eye, and his nose was twice its natural size.

In the midst of the fracas Jonas and Pete came in and separated the beligerents.

"Go at once to your rooms and pack up!" commanded the indignant dominie. "You

ten minutes, and that the wagon would be at the door to take them to the station.

At the end of the time mentioned, Jonas came up, hustled their trunks down-stairs, and dumped them into the wagon.

They followed, sneaking down by the back way to avoid meeting Dick, who they feared would be laying for them.

The young fellow was not in sight, however, nor did he appear up to the time they got into the wagon, and they breathed much freer in consequence.

"I shall write to your father, young men," said the Parson, "and tell him just how you have deported yourselves since being in my house. The record is not one



"Throw it on the table, Sadie." The order was spoken plainly enough, and the Parson did not appear to have been drinking. Thump! That obedient slavey did as she was told in a jiffy. Right in the middle of the table went the coal, and there was a general scattering of crockery.

"That's right, punch each other, you suckers."

"Why, Parson, Mr. Richardson, you astonish me!"

"Shut up, old gal," in Hiram's voice.

"Hold your tongue," from Rastus.

"Mr. Richardson, will you allow those loafers to insult me like that in our own house?"

"No, my dear, I will not. Richard, call Jonas. Your cousins shall not remain here another hour.

"We won't go for you. Go soak your head."

The Parson struck the bell savagely at this retort.

"You can't get rid of us, you old fraud."

Hiram and Rastus, who appeared to have made these remarks were in the meantime busily engaged in punching each other's heads.

They hadn't said a word, having no time to do so while dodging and giving blows.

Dick now put in some of his fine work.

"You're a mean sneak, Hiram Diggs."

Riff!

Whack!

Bash!

"You're a liar, a double distilled liar."

shall not remain in my house another hour. It has been nothing but trouble since you came."

"Get out, you old stuff! We're glad to go. Yah, rats!"

"Take the insolent boors away!" cried Mrs. Richardson. "I am glad they are going. They would soon corrupt that innocent boy of mine if they stayed."

"Not much, ma," laughed Dick. "I don't go with chumps like that."

"It's all Dick's doings, anyhow," blustered Rastus. "He's a—"

"Get out, you chumps," said Dick. "I wouldn't be so mean as to work the rackets you do. That isn't my style."

Pete and Jonas lugged the brothers off to their rooms, and Jonas gave them each a kick as he left them.

"That's tu pay fur the trick yu played on me last night," he said, by way of explanation.

"That mean Dick must have told on us," blubbered Hiram.

You see, they thought everybody as low down as themselves.

The Parson sent Pete up in half an hour to inform them that they must be ready in

to be proud of by any means, and I am glad that you are to be no longer with us. Good morning."

Then the Parson went indoors and Jonas drove the two freaks to the station.

Here they met Dick, who had gone on ahead to buy their tickets.

"I've got a little present for each of you ducks before you quit this peaceful scene," he remarked, coming up as the brothers got out. "Jonas, take the tickets. The train is not due for five minutes, and that's all I want for the presentation."

Then he proceeded to give each of the cranks a good licking, which was the little present he had brought them.

First he did up Hiram, to the delight of Jonas, and quite up to the liking of the queen, if she had been consulted.

Then he walloped Rastus, and did the job up brown, to the joy of all who witnessed the performance.

"Toot-toot—whoo!"

"That's all I've got to say to you fellows," he remarked. "There comes the train. Wherever you go next I hope you'll be wiser. If you ain't, you'll deserve another just such a licking. Now slide!"

He gave them each a parting kick, and

as the train came along just then Jonas hustled them both into the baggage car and dumped their duds on top of them.

The conductor waved his hand, the engine puffed and tooted, the wheels began going around, a lot of smoke rolled out, and away went the train, carrying Hiram and Rastus Diggs, who never more occupied a place in the Parson's household and who are now out of this story and a good riddance to them.

Jonas drove back to the house, and Master Dick went to school, where he proceeded to enjoy himself before going inside by beating the whole gang of boys in running, jumping, vaulting, and other healthful exercises.

There was a new principal in the school, the old one being laid up just then, and Dick thought that he might as well do something to make it lively for him.

None of the boys in the school had ever tumbled to his ventriloquial powers, although Dick had made use of them occasionally without mentioning the fact.

After the opening exercises were over with and the class work was going on, a boy over by an open window sang out:

"Say, can I go out?"

"What do you want to go out for, Brooks?" asked the pedagogue.

"Don't want ter," said Brooks.

"Then what made you ask?"

"I didn't."

"Yes, he did. Come on, Brooksy," said a voice outside the window.

"Who is that?" asked the teacher.

"Go find out, you old plug," came from behind him.

He turned quickly to see who had spoken, but there was no one there.

"Hi, Brooks, come out—don't mind that old soaker," cried the voice outside again.

"Who is that?" demanded the principal.

"I must know."

"It's Sam Small, that's who it is," cried a voice over to the right.

The boy who had apparently spoken was one of the unpopular ones, and Sam Small was an old man half blind, with only one leg, who sometimes went around town begging.

"Go tell Small to come in here, if you know him, Rogers."

"What you want Sam Small in here for? He don't go to school."

"That's a lie, teacher. I do. Come on, Brooks. What are yer 'fraid of?"

"Go and tell him to come in at once, Rogers."

"Yes, sir, but Sam don't go to school. He's an old blind man."

"Then what made you say he was the boy out-side?"

"I didn't."

"You most certainly did."

"No, sir, I—"

"Silence."

Rogers buttoned his lip and the principal was about to say something when he appeared to say to Brooks:

"Brooks, jump out of that window."

"All right, sir," said Brooks, getting up.

"You certainly did say so," continued the teacher, looking at Rogers and not noticing Brooks.

"You're another, you old jay," said the supposed Sam Small outside.

That attracted the man's attention to the window where Brooks was just getting out.

"What are you doing there, Brooks?"

"Getting out of the window like you told me to."

"I told you to get out the window?" asked the other, in surprise.

"Yes."

"You're mistaken."

"You're a dude," came from the other side of the room.

The principal turned to see who had made the remark.

"Go on, Brooks, jump out," he seemed to say at the same time.

"All right," and out went Brooks.

"Hi, hi, look out, you jumped on my head," was heard outside.

"Where is Brooks?" demanded the boss of the place, turning.

"Gone out the window, as you told him," cried half a dozen boys.

"I told him to go out?"

"Yes, sir," and the chorus swelled to a dozen.

He could not dispute this strong evidence, and so he said no more, and went on with the school work, wondering if his brain was really affected or not.

Half an hour afterwards, as the boys were all grinding away at their lessons, they were surprised to hear the teacher say:

"School is dismissed for the day. Get out of here as fast as you can."

You can imagine the noise that followed that remark.

PART X.

EVERY boy in that school grabbed his books and made a rush for the lobbies where the hats and caps were hung up.

The teacher looked up in astonishment from a book he was reading.

"What does all this mean?" he demanded as the boys began rushing out.

Nobody answered him, all being in a hurry to get out.

"Here, here, where are you going? Rogers, come back here. Norton, what does all this mean? Richardson, will you explain?"

"You told us school was dismissed," said Rogers.

"And for us to hurry out," added Norton.

"I told you that school was dismissed?"

"Yes, sir, for the day, and told us to hurry and get out."

Half the boys were out as it was and others were going.

"Did I say that, Richardson?" asked the puzzled proprietor.

"Yes, sir," put in Norton, who was one of the best fellows in the school.

"Well, I did not mean to if I did. However, you can take a recess for half an hour."

Out flew the boys while the principal sat down, very badly rattled.

"It's very strange," he mused, when the boys were all out. "What could I have been thinking about?"

The boys were not sorry to have an extra recess and they made the most of it.

They didn't have as much time to play as they thought they were going to have.

They were playing around the school house when they suddenly heard the master say.

"Here, now, come in all of you."

Those who heard, looked toward the school and saw the teacher standing in the door.

Nobody doubted that he had called them, but he had not said a word.

He had simply gone to the door to see what his pupils were doing.

In a jiffy they hurried for the house, and the man suddenly yelled.

"Now then, come in quietly and no funny business," the leaders heard as they went in.

The master was somewhat surprised to see them all come in ahead of time, but he said nothing, and business was resumed at the old stand.

Five minutes or so passed, when his voice was heard saying:

"Norton, stand on your chair."

"What for?" asked Norton.

"What's that?" asked the master, looking up.

"What shall I stand on my chair for?"

"I don't see any reason," answered the principal.

"But you told me to do it."

"You are mistaken, I said nothing."

The boys looked from one to the other as if they thought their preceptor was going wild.

"Harris, come here," was the next order issued in a minute or two.

Harris got up and went forward.

"Well, Harris, what is it?"

"Didn't you want me, sir?"

"No, I did not."

"But you called me up."

"I beg your pardon, I did not."

Once more the boys looked at each other in surprise.

"I don't know what ails you all," said the teacher. "You either have remarkable imaginations or you are playing tricks on me. Harris, you can sit down."

Harris sat down as he was told and there was no more funny business after that.

Dick did not care to rattle the poor pedagogue too much for one time and so he let up on his ventriloquism and gave the man a rest, leaving the boys wondering at their master's strange conduct, but never guessing what had been the real reason for it all.

It happened about now, when the weather was fine and everybody was well and hearty, that Master Dick got off another racket on his worthy dad, simply to keep his hand in.

After the two sneaks had left, the Parson supposed that things would go along swimmingly, but they did not suit him for all that.

He couldn't tell what ailed everybody, he declared, for they all appeared to be going crazy.

They would do the most insane things, and then declare that he had told them to do them, when he had not opened his head.

This was particularly the case with the servants about the place, and the Parson threatened to discharge them all nearly every day.

Of course, Dick was at the bottom of the mischief, and he had no end of fun, knowing that his pop would not send anyone away, as he had a habit of forgetting his anger half an hour after it had been aroused.

Sadie, the hired girl, was one whom Dick had not bothered very much, although she came in for an occasional snap, and so Dick thought it about time he gave her an extra dose.

They were all sitting at breakfast one morning, the Parson, Mrs. Richardson and Dick, when Sadie came in with a plate of hot biscuits or something.

"Sadie, bring in a scuttle of coal," said the Parson's voice.

"All right," said the girl, and away she went.

"What do you want coal brought in for?" asked the Parson's wife. "There is no fire here now."

"I didn't know that I did want coal, my dear," returned the Parson, looking up.

"Then what made you tell Sadie to bring it in?"

"I don't remember that I did do so, my dear."

"Well, you certainly did."

"But I wasn't thinking about coal."

"You are getting more and more absent minded every day. Can't you stop it?"

"Really, my dear, I don't see that I can. It's the servants about the place. They do the most extraordinary things."

Just in the midst of the discussion came that hired girl with a big scuttle of coal.

She did not know what they wanted it for, but they had ordered it and that was sufficient.

"Throw it on the table, Sadie."

The order was spoken plainly enough, and the Parson did not appear to have been drinking.

Thump!

That obedient slavey did as she was told in a jiffy.

Right in the middle of the table went the coal, and there was a general scattering of crockery.

Mrs. Richardson screamed, the Parson jumped up very much astonished, while Dick pushed back his chair and looked the picture of surprised innocence.

"For Heaven's sake, Sadie, what are you doing?"

"What do you mean by throwing coal on the table?"

"Only doing what you told me to, sir."

"Ah, I told you nothing."

"Why, my dear, I heard you tell her to do it."

"You're another; I didn't."

"Really, elder, you use very strange language."

"Why, I haven't said anything yet. I was too much astonished."

"I've got to do what I'm told," muttered Sadie, as she swung the scuttle on her arm and bounced out.

"A most extraordinary girl," muttered the Parson. "What made her do that, I wonder?"

"What made her do it?" repeated his wife. "What did you give her such an absurd order for? That's what I want to know."

"Absurd order, my dear?"

"Yes, insane, I might say."

"But I have given no insane orders to anyone."

"You don't call telling her to throw a scuttle of coal on the breakfast table a sane order, do you, Mr. Richardson?"

"Certainly not. I consider it a most extraordinary proceeding."

"I agree with you."

"What ails the girl?" resumed the Parson. "Has she had any mental troubles?"

"She only did as she was told, and she always does that."

"Well, certainly no one told her to put the coal on the table?"

"Why, you told her yourself, declared the lady, indignantly."

"Ah, go on. Nicey."

"Why, Elder, how you do talk! I am surprised."

"Same here, Petey."

"Really, sir, if you can't use more elegant expressions, Mr. Richardson, I shall have to leave the table."

"You can't take it with you, can you?"

"Really, sir, I cannot allow you to talk like that. Think of the bad example you are setting that innocent boy."

The innocent one was taking in all the fun, making it, in fact, with as guileless an air as that of a painted cherub.

"Bad example, elegant expressions? Why, my dear, I haven't uttered a syllable."

"Oh go on, you old jay. I say you have."

It was now the Parson's turn to be astonished.

"Really, my dear, I do not think I could have understood. What did you say I was?"

"I didn't say you were anything," muttered his wife, at a loss to account for the voice so exactly her own, which had made use of such strange words.

"Oh, I thought you did, but no matter, send for Sadie and tell her to clean up here."

"You ought to have thought of that before you told her to put the coal on the cloth."

"But I did not tell her to do it," cried the rattled Parson.

"You most certainly did, and Dick and I heard you distinctly. There could be no mistake about it."

The poor man could not deny it in the face of such evidence, but he was greatly puzzled all the same.

"It can't be that I am losing my mind," he mused, after he had gone to his study.

"Perhaps I need a rest. I think I will exchange pulpits with Brother Wagner next Sabbath."

Mrs. Richardson had a private consultation with the hired girl after breakfast, and asked the latter what was the matter.

"There ain't nothing the matter, Mrs. Richardson," said Sadie. "You always told me to do just what he says, and so I do."

"Yes, but there should be reason in everything."

"I don't get paid for giving reasons, and if he tells me to put the dog in the bird cage I'll do it."

"Yes, but if I tell you not to you will obey me."

"I can't do two things at once, m'am, and whatever I'm told to do I'll do."

"Well, after this, if Mr. Richardson gives you any strange orders like those of this morning consult me first."

"Yes'm," said Sadie, and the session closed.

The Parson did not understand it, but Dick gave him a rest for the remainder of the day, and by supper time he had forgotten all about the events of the morning.

If Dick did not bother his pop, there were others whom he could experiment with, however, and he lost no time in evolving a first-class snap from his busy brain.

It happened one afternoon a day or so later that the Parson came out of his study with the intention of taking a short walk around the place.

Jonas was just passing on his way to the barn when he heard the Parson say:

"Go build a fire in the study."

The weather was not hot, but it was plenty warm enough to make fires unnecessary.

"What say, Parson?" asked Jonas, somewhat surprised.

"Go build a fire in the study, I say, and a good hot one."

"All right," grunted Jonas, going his way.

"And, Jonas?"

"Yes," for the Parson seemed to have something else to say.

"After that start one in the parlor and another in the dining-room."

"All right," said Jonas.

Master Dick was around, but not in sight.

The Parson never heard a word of the orders supposed to have issued from his own mouth, and he scarcely looked at Jonas as the latter passed, and didn't know for certain whether he had said anything or not.

"The man must be gettin' a chill," mused Jonas. "Fires in the house in this weather! Wall, by gosh!"

However, he had his orders and he must execute them.

Off he went and made up a rousing big fire in the study, with the thermometer at sixty-five inside and seventy outside.

"What in time are you doing?" asked Sadie, the hired girl, when she saw Jonas passing through the hall with a lot of kindlings and a big scuttle of coal.

"Making a fire in the parlor."

"For goodness sakes! Ain't it hot enough?"

"Ain't got nothing to do with that. The boss told me to and that's all that consarns me."

Jonas did not say that he had already made up a rouser in the library.

"Well, I reckon Mr. Richardson is the funniest man I ever see," muttered the girl as Jonas went on.

The Parson's wife was up-stairs in her own room, sewing, and knew nothing of what was going on below.

By the time Jonas had built the parlor fire, the Parson had returned.

He did not notice the fire in the library when he first came in, but sat down and went to writing.

Presently, however, the heat made itself decidedly manifest, and he began to perspire like the very dickens.

"Dear me, how warm it is," he muttered.

"Summer is coming much earlier than usual this year."

Then he got up to look for a lighter coat, and saw the fire.

"Well, of all things! A fire in the middle of June, and with such weather, I am astounded."

Meanwhile, Jonas was making it good and hot in the dining-room.

Mrs. Richardson's room was just over this apartment, and the pipe from the stove below passed through a big air-tight drum used as a stove.

She began to feel the heat perceptibly, and wondered what made it so warm until she happened to put her hand on the drum.

Then she no longer wondered.

"Goodness gracious!" she ejaculated.

"Somebody is building a fire in the dining-room. What nonsense!"

Down-stairs she rushed, meeting Jonas just as he was coming out.

There was nearly a collision, for Jonas did not expect any one, and was rushing out, scuttle in hand, with no thought of meeting anybody.

The lady jumped aside, just in time, and then said: "Are you crazy, Jonas, or what?"

"No'm," said the man, "but I reckon the boss is."

"Don't you know better than to make up a fire in such warm weather?"

"Yes'm, but it's orders."

"Orders?" gasped the lady.

"Yes'm."

"Whese orders?"

"The Pa'son's, ma'm. He told me to make up fires in the parlor, the lib'ry and here."

"Goodness gracious! Three extra fires, and one in the kitchen besides. Why, we'll be roasted."

"Yes'm," grunted Jonas. "Maybe he's got the malaria, and wants to get warmed up like."

"The malaria, indeed! Why, he must be crazy."

Away she went in a hurry, rushing into

the study from the hall just as the Parson rushed out of it by the window.

"Parson, Mr. Richardson, my dear!" she called out, giving chase.

She caught up with her husband on the piazza.

Then both asked the same question.

"My dear, did you order a fire lighted in the library?"

"Eh, what is it?" asked the Parson, seeing that his wife had said something.

"Why in the name of common sense, Parson, did you have three extra fires lighted? Are you ill?"

"I? I order three extra fires?" exclaimed the Parson. "Why, I haven't ordered any. Three, did you say? Goodness me, one is too much."

"Jonas says you ordered extra fires, in the study, in the parlor and in the dining-room."

"Jonas said so?"

"Yes."

"Dear me, dear me," sighed the poor man. "That fellow is getting worse and worse every day. It's really extraordinary the way he acts. I don't know what we shall have to do with him."

"But he never does things unless you tell him. He is not fond enough of work for that. You must have told him about the fires."

"My gracious!" gasped the Parson, who rarely made use of such strong expressions. "You don't think I am insane, do you? Three fires! Why we don't need one."

Just then the couple went into the house. It was like an oven.

PART XI.

THE three extra fires which Jonas had lighted at the Parson's orders, as he supposed, were now getting on in their fine work.

The heat was fairly stifling up-stairs and down.

The best of it was that just before the Parson and his wife came in, Jonas, in leaving the house, heard the Parson say:

"Keep those fires up, Jonas. Go put coal on all of them."

He looked around, but saw only that boy Dick sitting under a tree whittling.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he muttered, as he went off to the cellar for more coal.

He had fixed the library fire, and was doing the same for the one in the dining-room, when Mr. and Mrs. Richardson entered.

They had been driven out of the parlor by the fiery temperature, even after having opened all the doors and windows and made for the dining-room to see how that was.

Here they found Jonas in the act of piling coal on the fire there.

"Jonas, what are you doing? Stop it, this minute! Do you want to roast us all out?"

It was the Parson himself who asked this very natural question.

Jonas dropped the scuttle, looked at his employer, and said:

"Why, gosh darn it, Pa'son, yew told me jest tew minutes ago tew keep them fires up and pile on more coal."

"Why, Jonas, I am astonished. How can you tell such falsehoods? I never said a word about making fires in the first place."

"Yus, yew did; yew telled me tew dew it when yew went out fur yure walk."

Mrs. Richardson looked from one to the other, and scarcely knew what to think.

She did not have the same confidence in Jonas, in regard to his truthfulness, as she had in black Pete, but then her husband had done so many queer things of late that she could expect almost anything from him.

"Pon my word, Mis' Rich'son," said Jonas earnestly, seeing the lady's look, "I hain't got no wish tew make the Parson out a liar, but just as true as I'm a-standin' here that was jest what he telled me when he went out."

"Nonsense!" cried the Parson. "I'm not an idiot, Jonas. I never told you anything of the sort. My word, isn't it hot! I shall stifle here. Open all the windows!"

Then out he rushed, leaving the question as to who had ordered the fires to be made still undecided.

He sought refuge in the study, but here, despite the fact that all the doors and windows were open, the heat was simply unbearable.

In fact it took the rest of the day and evening to get things cooled off, and yet Dick was as cool as a cucumber through it all, and no one tumbled.

One afternoon in the following week, when school was over, that same Dick passed the study windows, and saw his dad grinding away at his sermon.

At the same time Pete came in at the gate, having been down to the village on an errand for the missis.

"I guess pop wants to see you, Pete," said Dick, to the lanky nig, as he came up.

In fact, a sudden idea had jumped into that boy's head, and he wanted to give it something to do.

"Yo' fader wan' to see me, do he, Marse Dick?" repeated Pete.

"Yes, I think so. Go and see."

Pete walked into the study, when the Parson, without looking up from his work, seemed to say:

"Pete, you black rascal, go up to my room!"

"Yas'r," said Pete.

"Put on the suit of clothes you'll find hanging in the closet."

"Yo' am bery kin', sah," said the surprised coon.

"You'll find a shirt and all that sort of business too. Put 'em on, you lazy duffer."

"Yas'r, dreckly," said Pete, wondering what had struck the boss to be so generous.

"Now clear out and when you are dressed come down here."

"Yas'r, in a moment."

"And don't forget the hat."

"No, sah," and away went Pete to fix up.

The Parson had become dimly conscious that there was some one in the study and he looked up just as Pete flew up.

"It's very extraordinary," he muttered.

"Everybody about the house seems to think that my study is a thoroughfare, and that they can come and go as they please. I declare, literary people don't seem to have any rights whatever."

I do not wonder that the good man felt annoyed, for I have been bothered that way myself and can speak from experience.

The Parson had just settled down to work, and had knocked out his "fifthly" with some good solid arguments, when Pete came in again.

"Dere am yo' am, Pa'son," he said, abruptly. "How yo' like dis, h'm?"

The worthy clergyman looked up and a strange vision met his gaze.

No wonder that he could scarcely speak for astonishment.

There stood Pete, that lanky, slab-sided moke, looking like a misfit clergyman and presenting an appearance comical enough to make a misanthrope howl with glee.

The Parson's black trousers were too short for him, but the coat was plenty long enough, and the vest gave him lots of vacant room even when buckled up the back to the full length of the straps.

The choker collar was a choker indeed, and with the addition of a big white cravat, made Pete look as if he were being hanged.

The coon had supplemented one of the Parson's black silk hats, the best one, of course, to his outfit, and it fitted him a great deal too much.

Only for his ears, which were like wings, the dicer would have covered him up, but these useful organs prevented the hat from being an extinguisher.

There he stood feeling as proud as a peacock in his master's best suit, waiting for some sign of approval from the Parson.

The clothes gave him a certain clerical appearance, but the fit made him look as funny as a circus clown.

"How yo' like dat, boss?" he asked, after waiting for the Parson to say something.

"What do you mean by masquerading in my best clothes, how dare you take such liberties?" cried the good minister, jumping up and getting quite excited. "Go take them off this minute. How dare you—"

"Why, boss, yo' done tol' me yo'self, right yere in dis lib'y, on'y li' minutes ago, to go up an' put on de close an' den come down yer an' let yo' see how dey look."

"Nonsense, impossible, absurd! I never

told you anything of the sort. I couldn't be such an idiot. I haven't spoken a word to you. Take them off, sir, and take yourself off. I can't have such a fool around the place. I do declare everybody in the house seems to be going crazy."

The Parson's excited manner and loud tones brought his wife to the study just as Pete, getting scared, was about to vacate it.

"What does this mean?" demanded the lady.

"Don' know, missus," broke in Pete. "Fus' de Pa'son call me in yer an' tell me to go up-stairs an' put on de close I fin' dere an' den when I do he gimme fits. Can't make it out 'tall, missus."

"Well, go take them off and put on your own. You ought to have known better. You look like a fright."

"Yas, missus, but dey am good stuff, an' I reckon if yo' let out de pants and take in de weskit, dey fit putty good aftah all."

"Go take them off this instant, and don't mind what your master says in future, when he gives you such foolish orders," said the lady, in the tones and with the manner of she-who-must-be-obeyed.

That settled things for Pete, and out he went a-flying.

The Parson had seated himself and had the look of a man who is all broken up.

"I declare!" he muttered, emphatically, "I can't understand it. The people in this house grow worse and worse every day. Really, my dear, you will have to get new servants. Those we have act like insane persons."

"The servants are good enough," retorted his wife, "but if you will tell them to do such ridiculous things you must expect them to make confusion. The idea of your sending Peter up to your room to overhaul your—"

"But, my dear, I never told him to do it. Pray, give me credit for possessing a little common sense."

"He says that you told him to, and his appearance certainly goes to show that you must have."

"But it is so absurd, so supremely ridiculous, so extraordinarily nonsensical, my dear, to think that I would send him on such an errand."

"You certainly did do so, strange as it seems, for Peter says you did, and he has never told me an untruth yet."

"Dear, dear, I can't make it out," sighed the perplexed Parson. "I couldn't have been such a lunatic. Where is Richard? Perhaps he can—"

"Oh, yes. You blame that innocent boy when he hasn't been near the house this afternoon," cried Mrs. Richardson, who wouldn't hear a word against Dick. "You are getting to be just like those contemptible cousins of Dick's whom we had to send away. The idea of putting it on that poor boy when it's only your own abstraction and absent-mindedness that's to blame."

Then she sailed out of the room very indignant, leaving the poor Parson so rattled that he couldn't think of a single thing for an hour or more.

That young scamp, Dick, had heard his mother's defense of him and he softly chuckled as he vacated the premises and went off towards the woods.

He had seen Pete in his ministerial get-up, and the sight was enough to furnish him with laughing material for all the afternoon.

Pete thought that the Parson was somewhat off his base, holding the same opinion as his mistress, and when he had resumed his own garments, he went about his work, muttering:

"Don' see wha' de mattah wif de Pa'son 'tall. Dem tings fit me good 'nuff. Wha' fo' he tell me to put 'em on fo', if he don' wan' to gib 'em to me? Reckon he am a little bit teched in de head."

Pete was not discharged, the Parson's suit was given a good brushing and airing, and that was the end of the matter.

A few days after this the Parson took Dick to prayer meeting with him.

Dick would much sooner have remained at home, but his father did not give him any option in the case.

"It'll keep him out of mischief," he said to his wife, "and then he will be setting a

good example to the other boys in the village."

I won't say anything about the example, good or bad, but as far as keeping that boy out of mischief went, it couldn't be done.

Prayer meetings, funerals, or anything else could not have done it.

In fact, if that lively youth had been laid in the deep and quiet grave, it is my firm belief that he would have got up some racket on the other remains, changed coffins on them, made them get up a scrapping match, or indulged in some other lark equally facetious.

If the Parson had taken my advice he would have left Richard at home that evening.

Off they went, however, and Dick was put in the front pew, right under the Parson's eye, and the proceedings commenced.

"This is the rockiest meeting I ever saw," commented the Parson, turning the leaves of the hymn book. "If more of you don't come out I'll close up the shop."

Some of the members looked horrified, while others smiled and many giggled.

The sentiment was all right, for there ought to have been more at the meeting, but the words were considered rather sensational.

"Stop your giggling, Sister Wiggins, you are altogether too fresh."

This was after the manner of the Reverend Sam Jones, and Sister Wiggins did not like it, but could say nothing nevertheless.

The gang sung a couple of verses, and then the Parson, looking over some papers, seemed to say:

"Brother Tomlinson, will you go out and get a bucket of water? I'm as dry as a chip."

A pitcher generally sufficed, and the Parson's request was considered somewhat extraordinary.

The brother was ready to comply with the elder's request, however, and so he got up and went out, while smiles went around the room.

The Parson frowned as he saw Brother Tomlinson leave his seat, and called on Sister Samantha Scrubb to relate her experience.

The lady was one of the long-winded sort, and she started off on what would have been a three volume romance, if she had not been suddenly stopped.

She was just telling what an awful man her husband had been, and was going on to relate how she had yanked him into the fold, when Brother Tomlinson came along with a big bucket chock full of water.

"Throw half of that on the sister to cool her off."

The speaker was too much excited to notice what was said, but Brother Tomlinson understood well enough.

He lifted the pail and was about to let Scrubb have it in the neck, when a woman sitting next to him set up a yell.

She had on a new spring bonnet, and she didn't care to have it spoiled.

"Look out what you're about, Josh Tomlinson," she howled.

That attracted Sister Scrubb's attention, and she stopped.

"Put down that bucket!" she commanded.

"Never mind what she says. Let her have it."

"Why, Mr. Richardson, how can you tell him to do such a thing?" yelled Scrubbs, backing out of the way.

"What's that?" asked the minister, awaking from his reverie. "Why don't you go on, Sister Scrubb? Your remarks are very soul satisfying."

"Did you tell Tomlinson to throw water on me?"

"Certainly not!" exclaimed the bewildered Parson.

Tomlinson thought otherwise, but he did not like to say so.

"Chuck it on the floor. It needs scrubbing."

Tomlinson let fly and the whole aisle was deluged.

Women screamed and put their feet on the benches, men laughed and boys giggled.

The Parson was thunderstruck at the outrageous conduct of so estimable a member of the congregation.

"Why, Brother Tomlinson, I am astonished!" he cried. "What ails you this evening?"

"Didn't you tell me to throw the water on the floor?"

The Parson was too dumfounded to speak for several seconds.

Dick improved the opportunity and made him say:

"Get out, you lunk head, I didn't."

The brothers and sisters looked at each other in utter dismay.

Really, their beloved pastor was getting worse and worse.

"Tell you to throw water on the floor, Brother Tomlinson?" exclaimed the Parson, at length. "Why, no, indeed."

his manner of doing it was somewhat unusual.

"Wall, guess the dominie's been hearing some of them York preachers," commented Brother Hayseed, "and has got to copying their ways. Reckon it's all right, but I can't say as I like it. Too much like camp-meeting to suit me."

Finally, when somebody else got up to speak, and at the Parson's own invitation, he startled all hands by saying:

"Come, that's enough for one night. Hustle out of here. Blinks, put out the lights!"

The Parson was as much astonished as any one when he saw the people suddenly

much, for he was deaf, and Dick usually kept away from the house when burning crackers or anything of that sort.

Besides, if Dick had wanted to make a racket right in the house itself, she would have let him, and thought it very unreasonable if anybody objected.

If he had not been a sensible young fellow, our Dick would have been spoiled by that mother of his; but he didn't lose his head, and went right on having all the fun he could, and never fancying he was any better than a thousand other boys.

For the celebration he bought a box of crackers, a lot of powder, and things like that for the day, with rockets and wheels,



The clothes gave him a certain clerical appearance, but the fit made him look as funny as a circus clown. "How yo' like dat, boss?" he asked after waiting for the Parson to say something. "What do you mean by masquerading in my best clothes, how dare you take such liberties?" cried the good minister, jumping up and getting quite excited.

The brother couldn't make it out and he sat down feeling very much ashamed.

The Parson forgot that Sister Scrubb had not finished her story and he called on some one else, and so the long-winded one got a knock out.

The Scrubbs and the Tomlinsons were not on very good terms, although members of the same church, and Scrubb declared that Tomlinson had fetched in the water just to stop her talking, being jealous of her abilities in that line.

That was not all the fun that Dick had that evening.

Brother Windbag was rumbling along in a wheezy voice, telling of his many sins, when the Parson said apparently:

"That's enough of that stuff. Sing the ninety-ninth hymn."

The organist started up, of course, and Brother Windbag had to sit down.

After that, when Sister Sarah Toga was relating her experiences in a very teary voice, she was interrupted with:

"Ah, cheese it. Give us something different."

The people did not so much wonder at the Parson's choking off the speakers, but

get up and leave in a body without being dismissed in the usual manner.

There was nothing for it but to leave, however, as the janitor began to put out the lights preparatory to closing up.

Dick and the Parson got home nearly an hour earlier than usual and Mrs. Richardson said:

"Why, you must have had a very short meeting. Wasn't there any one out?"

"Oh, yes, but they didn't seem to want to stay. I don't see what ails some of them. They acted in the most extraordinary fashion. I can't understand it at all."

Perhaps Dick could have explained matters, but he never said a word.

PART XII.

THE fourth of July was coming, and Dick meant to give it a good send-off, and no mistake.

He was just like other wide awake Yankee boys, and he liked to make a noise and plenty of it on the anniversary of the nation's birth, and he usually had all the fun there was to be got out of it.

The Parson did not mind the noise very

and all that sort of showy business for the shades of evening.

During the forenoon, before going down into the town to enjoy himself with the boys, he amused himself with standing on the piazza and chucking lighted crackers up into the trees or on the walk, a dozen at a time.

In his study the Parson was grinding away at the last pages of a spread eagle oration, to be given on the green that afternoon.

The noise did not bother him, for one boy can't make such an awful lot, anyhow, with only fire-crackers, for Dick wouldn't shoot off a gun around the house.

He looked in once or twice, and saw the dominie writing away, thoroughly absorbed in his work, and presently an idea popped into his head.

Pete, the slim darky, helped to put it there, for he came loafing along just about then, with a pail of water in his hand.

"Musin' yo'se'f, Marse Dick?" he asked, stopping to look at the young fellow.

"Oh, yes, a little. How are things with you, Pete?"

"Putty good, sah, putty good. T'ank

yo', sah. Dem powdah crack allus makes a heap ob noise, doesn' dey?"

"Oh, yes, some. I suppose you used to chuck 'em about when you were a kid?"

"M—m, honey, yo' bet yo' life, an' I reckon I'd git mos' much fun out ob it now, Marse Dick. Yo' fader don' min' de noise?"

"No, indeed. He rather likes it, I think."

"Peter, hallo, you, Peter."

That was certainly the Parson calling.

"Yes'r, yer I is."

"Come in here, you black scamp."

"Beats all how yo' fader do talk dese days, Marse Dick. Yo'd fink he war gwine to skin yo' alibe."

"Yes, but he doesn't mean anything by it, Pete."

"No, I s'pose not, but—"

"Now then, you lazy nigger, are you coming or aren't you?"

Pete jumped, looked scared and darted into the study.

"Yer I is, Pa'son, I on'y jus' heerd yo', an' I couldn' go no fastah."

"Cheese that and listen to me."

"Yas'r, I'se all attentium."

The Parson knew that some one was in the room, but he was in the middle of a high flown sentence and couldn't stop.

"Go out to Dick's box, Pete, and get half a dozen packs of crackers."

"Yas'r, I get 'em dis minnit."

"Light 'em and set 'em off in here, a pack at a time."

"Wha' dat yo' say, sah?" asked the surprised coon, scarcely believing his ears.

Just then the Parson happened to turn around.

"Get out of here, you black idiot, and do as I say."

"Yas'r, d'reckly," and away flew Pete out of the window.

"Very extraordinary how that man acts," muttered the Parson. "Now what did he want in here? Dear, dear, no one seems to think I have a study to myself, the way they invade it."

Pete went out and began helping himself from Dick's box.

"Hallo, Pete, are you going to set off some?"

"Yas, Marse Dick, but wha' yo' tink now?"

"I don't know, what is it?"

"Yo' fader am de stranges' man sometimes."

"Why, what has he done now, Pete?" asked that innocent Dick.

"Tol' me to fiah off dem crackahs in his lib'ry."

"Well, if he told you to do it you'd better do so."

That settled the matter with Pete.

He picked out half a dozen packs of crackers ripped the ulsters off of them, took a big piece of punk and went into the library.

"That's the talk, Pete. Let her flicker."

The coon lighted the fuses of two packs and chucked them up to the ceiling.

Such a snapping, cracking, hissing and fizzing was never known before in that quiet place.

The Parson jumped up in a fright for he could not help hearing the racket.

"What are you doing, Peter?" he demanded, dancing up and down.

Pete chucked up another pack and the crackers flew all over.

They were snapping and shooting in all directions and you couldn't get out of their way.

The room seemed fairly alive with them in fact.

"Stop, stop!" fairly yelled the Parson.

"What are you doing, Peter? You will set fire to something."

Pete tossed up another pack before the Parson could make himself heard.

The room was full of smoke and the crackers were darting this way and that, over the floor, under the desk, up in the air, out at the door and in all directions.

The Parson made a dash for the door and rushed out upon the piazza searching for Dick.

That clever youth had absconded in order to avoid answering troublesome questions.

Mr. Richardson found the pail of water which Pete had left on the piazza and he seized this and rushed into the library.

Then he let drive with it just as Pete was coming out.

The lathy coon was drenched and nearly upset as well.

"Hol' on dere, hol' on, Mr. Rich'son," he gasped. "Couldn' yo' saw whar yo' was gwine?"

The crackers had not done any damage, for there were no lace curtains or anything of that sort in the room, but they had made an awful muss in the place just the same.

"Whatever induced you to set off those fire-crackers here, Peter?" asked the Parson. "Have you taken entire leave of your senses?"

"I on'y done wha' yo' tol' me ter, sah," answered Pete.

"Only did what I told you to, Peter?" gasped the Parson.

"Dat's all, sah."

"But I never told you to set off those crackers in my study."

"Scuse me, sah, but am jess wha' yo' tol' me. Yo' ax Marse Richard, sah, an' he'll tell yo' de same ting."

The Parson went out to find Dick, but that young gentleman, after assuring himself that everything was safe, had gone to the village to continue his rackets.

Pete did not suppose that any more was wanted of him, and he went off to change his shirt while the Parson, after looking for Dick and not finding him, returned to finish his oration.

That was not the last of Dick's Fourth of July fun by a heap.

As I remarked he went down into the village for more.

He found it lying around in large chunks, only waiting to be picked up.

In front of the post-office were Himrod Swaggles and Abijah Gesicks, each with a light open wagon and a scraggy nag.

Himrod was a great horse jockey and never lost an opportunity to race, trade, sell or buy.

The nag he had with him on this occasion, while not a racer exactly, had some good points in him and could go a mile in about three minutes.

Abijah's plug couldn't come up to that, he was blind of an eye and he had feet like firkins. For all that, Mr. Gesicks was a fellow who wouldn't take a dare no matter what it was.

Himrod was one of those ducks who are always on the lookout to make money, no matter how.

The two had arrived shortly before our Dick did and they were now talking upon the respective points of their steeds.

"That hoss o' yourn is blind," remarked Himrod, "an' he ain't no good, nohow."

"Wull, yas, I know he's blind but that don't signify. He's got good p'int's if he is blind," retorted Abijah who wouldn't let any one run down a thing that he owned.

"Shucks! he can't go a mile in five minutes."

"Reckon he kin dew tew in thet time or if he can't, yures can't."

"Tell what I'll do," said Himrod. "I'll bet you I'll beat you to the Methodist meetin' haouse."

"Yu can't du it nuther," answered Abijah.

"Bet yu ten dollars I kin then."

"I don't want tu take yure money on a dead sartin thing."

"Shucks! you dassent do it. Come now, I dare you to race."

That was enough for Abijah.

"I'll race ye as fur as the meetin' haouse," but no furdur."

"Yas, and yu'll get beat too."

"Like fun, I will."

Dick was a listener to this jawing match, but he didn't say anything.

He did not exercise his ventriloquial powers, for he had another plan in view.

He picked a pack of crackers out of his box and toyed with a piece of punk which he had lighted on the sly.

"Are you ready?" asked Himrod, gathering up his reins.

"Wait till I get even with you and I am."

"All right, get in line."

Several spectators had gathered by this time, for two men stopping to talk will always draw a crowd in the country.

Nobody took any great notice of Dick, for they were all interested in the approaching race.

"Ready naow?"

"Yas."

"Then let somebody give the word. Will you, Hiram Jinks?"

"Don't mind if I du," said Hiram, a lanky jay, with bleached hair, dishwatery eyes and a plug of tobacco in his mouth.

"All right; let her start."

"Ready—go!" said Hiram.

Away they went, Himrod taking the lead.

Then Dick got in his fine work in that quiet way of his.

It took two seconds to light that pack of fire-crackers, and another to chuck them under the forefeet of Abijah's nag.

That was the one thing that that plug couldn't stand.

You could twist his tail, stick pins in him, cover him with flies or yell at him, but he wouldn't go if he didn't choose.

With fire-crackers, however, he acted in quite a different manner.

At the first snap, he bolted as if all Tophet were after him.

At the second, he snorted, laid back his ears and dusted worse than ever.

His hoofs got entangled in the crackers and they kept right along with him.

Himrod was not in that race, not even a little bit.

His nag wasn't scared by the crackers, but he couldn't get up the pace that Abijah's plug could.

That one eyed Bucephalus passed him in the first two rods of the race.

When they got to the Methodist church he was a quarter of a mile behind.

The best of it was, though, that Abijah couldn't stop when he got there.

That racer of his had things all his own way.

The crackers had long since given their last crack, but that didn't make any odds.

That nag had them fresh in his memory still and he kept right on.

The crowd around the post-office had followed the racers at first, but they soon dropped out of it.

They couldn't run for laughing at seeing that big-footed, one-eyed guy of a horse beating Himrod's racer.

As for Himrod, he felt pretty sore at his defeat. "Who in thunder threw them crackers, anyway?" he sputtered. "Of course the gol blamed critter hed to git scared and go like all possessed arter that."

Abijah would have been glad to stop at the church, but his nag had other ideas about that.

He wanted to collar that ten cases too, for he knew that Himrod was a bit shady and would chisel him out of it if he didn't collect it at once.

"Whoa, gol blast ye!" he yelled, sawing on the reins.

His prize beauty had the bit between his teeth, however, and wasn't letting go.

"Whao, I tell yu!"

He might just as well have called to the wind.

Then he tried another dodge, calculating on the obstinacy of his steed.

"Get along there, yu brute! What are yer loafin' fur? Get up!"

This plan did not work as he had supposed it would, for the nag did not stop.

On the contrary, he kept right on at the same old gate.

Worse than that, when he reached the outskirts of the town some rascally boy chucked a big cannon cracker under his feet as he went gliding by.

After that there was no stopping him till he played out.

He came to a halt two miles out of town, and then he did not feel like going back.

Abijah couldn't coax him to go back either, until he got good and ready.

He sneaked into town about three hours afterwards, and then Himrod Swaggles could not be found, high or low.

In the meantime, however, Dick had been having lots of fun, and had forgotten all about Abijah.

Along about dinner time he went home and found he had a few minutes to spare.

He saw Pete out on the lawn and that put another snap in his noddle.

The Parson was in his study but he presently came to the door and looked out.

"Peter!"

"Yas'r, heah I is."

"Go round to the barn and bring me that empty barrel by the door."

"A'right, sah, I'se gwine."

That barrel, by the way, was not as empty as Pete supposed it was.

When he got to the barn he saw it standing there, looking as innocent as you please, and he started forward to pick it up.

He did not know why the Parson wanted it and didn't care, his business being to obey orders and say nothing.

Dick had monkeyed with that barrel in the short time that it took Pete to get to the barn.

Just as the coon went to take hold of it, there was a stunning old report and the barrel went up five or six feet in the air.

and Dick would have lots of time to go fishing, boating and enjoy himself generally, but, as he always did that, it really did not matter very much to him whether school kept or not.

One evening about this time, the Parson took Dick with him to prayer meeting, to keep him out of mischief.

If he had really wanted to do that in the most effectual manner, he should have locked the young fellow up in a closet or something of that sort.

However, he took him to meeting with him, and Dick sat in a front pew, looking perfectly innocent, but full of mischief for all that.

He did not cut up during the meeting,

every now and then, and smiled under his breath, as it were, in anticipation of the fun in prospect.

Presently there was a sound of tramping feet on the piazza, and the front door bell rang vigorously.

"Run to the door, Dick," said Mrs. Richardson. "Sadie has gone out."

Dick went to the door, leaving the sitting room door open.

When he opened the outer one in swept a troop of ladies and gentlemen, and he skipped out.

The Parson looked up as the procession began to file into the sitting room.

"Good-evening!" shouted the gang. "You see we're all here."



The Parson jumped up in a fright for he could not help hearing the racket. "What are you doing, Peter?" he demanded, dancing up and down. Peter chucked up another pack and the crackers flew all over. They were snapping and shooting in all directions and you couldn't get out of their way.

There was a big Jumbo fire cracker under it, that was the reason.

"Golly! just look a' dat ba'll" snorted Pete, jumping back as a shower of burning paper fell all around him.

The barrel came down again, rolled over on its side and stayed there, and then Pete tumbled to the cause of the row.

"Wull! I jus' clar' fo' it. I didn' fink de Pa'son would play jokes on a fellow like dat," he muttered. "He done put dat bum-shell undah de ba'l a puppus so's to scare de wits out ob me, but I ain' gwine to tote de ba'l to um now, jus' to pay fo' it."

It is highly probable that the Parson would have been slightly astonished if Pete had brought the barrel to him, and so it was just as well that the coon did not do it.

There were more rackets before the day was over, of course, but that's all I'm going to tell about this time.

It was a day of fun and no mistake, when it was over Dick went to bed and slept like a top with never a twinge of conscience for having sold so many people that day, but quite ready to do the same thing over again in the morning.

School was over now until the autumn,

and nothing happened to disturb the harmony of the gathering.

After the thing was over, however, and the Parson was looking for his hat and gloves, he seemed to say:

"By the way, friends, I want you all to come up to my house to-morrow evening. Don't bring anything. We've got enough for everybody."

The Parson evidently was doing things on a liberal scale, for there were twenty or thirty people present.

There had been donation parties from time to time when the Parsonage was stocked with doughnuts enough to last a month, but this thing went ahead of all.

The people smiled and promised themselves a good time, and the Parson wondered why they all seemed so happy.

"I must have been more eloquent than usual," the good man mused as he drove home with Dick.

The next evening arrived, and the Parson, his wife and Dick were in the sitting-room quietly enjoying themselves, and never thinking of company or anything of that sort.

That is, Mrs. Richardson and the Parson were not, but Dick looked at the clock

"I asked some friends, for I thought you wouldn't mind."

"Good-evening," said Mrs. Richardson, faintly, and with very little enthusiasm, for she wondered how in time she was going to take care of all that gang, with the girl out, and nothing in the house to speak of.

The Parson got up, his surprise being plainly visible.

"Good-evening. Why didn't you say you were coming?"

The room was full by this time, and there was a crowd in the hall and more out on the piazza.

The Parson didn't seem glad to see them, and glances were interchanged.

Presently the Parson's wife remarked, or seemed to:

"I hope you brought something to eat with you."

"Yes, I don't see how you expect me to feed such a mob," added the Parson.

"Why, Parson!" muttered his wife, in a whisper. "Sh!"

"Well, you may as well sit down, I suppose, now you are here, but you might have told us something about it."

Mrs. Richardson punched the good man

and frowned at him, but he did not know what he had done any more than the man in the moon.

The party promised to be very hilarious, considering the way it started off.

PART XIII.

SOON the Parson's guests began to take off their duds and scatter themselves through the house.

They had not been very cordially received, to be sure, but a country gang is not easily frightened off when they think there is a free racket on board. The thing that troubled the Parson's wife the most was how to provide for such a lot of people.

If she had expected them it would have been all right, but here were forty or fifty people coming in on her all of a sudden, without anything to eat and no time to send for anything.

She saw no signs of boxes or baskets and was sure that nobody had brought any thing, evidently expecting that all the needful would be provided.

"Dear, dear, what am I going to do?" she thought as she hustled around to find seats for the gang.

"I think you might have told me you were coming," she seemed to say.

She was too rattled to hear this, but the company did, and they exchanged glances.

"It's a hungry gang, too, and they didn't bring even a cracker."

Mrs. Richardson heard this remark, which appeared to come from the Parson, and she looked reproachfully at him.

"Make yourself at home, friends," said the Parson, not understanding his wife's looks. "This is an unexpected pleasure."

"Yes, but how are we going to feed such a mob?"

This time the Parson heard, and he looked at his wife in astonishment.

The visitors did the same thing, and began to think that perhaps they ought not to have come.

"Well, I'd brought something," spoke up Sister Lobelia Higgins, who had the reputation of always speaking her mind, "but the Parson said distinctly that we wasn't to bring nothing, 'cause they was enough and spare in the house."

"What a gall!" was the retort, evidently from the Parson himself.

"My dear!" exclaimed his wife.

"Gall or not, it's just what you said," snapped the sister, "and twenty or thirty people heard you say it."

"Ah, go on, you haven't got all your buttons."

"Why, my dear, I am surprised."

"What about?" asked the Parson, who was lost in bewilderment.

"I didn't come here to eat anyhow," said Sister Higgins.

"Yes, you did, you're always hungry," said the voice of Deacon Smith, over in a corner. Sister Higgins looked mad and several persons giggled.

"That's so, Brother Smith," came from another corner.

This produced a digression, and Mrs. Richardson managed to get her husband's attention and draw him into the kitchen.

"What made you invite all those people without saying a word to me?" she asked.

"Why, my dear, I didn't ask 'em. I never was so surprised in my life."

"And there isn't a thing in the house, the store is closed and nobody brought anything."

"Well, we don't have to give them their supper, do we?"

"It's always customary."

"Well!" gasped the Parson. "I don't see how we can. I certainly didn't ask all that lot of people to come."

"You probably did and then forgot all about it," said his wife. "I wish you were not so absent-minded."

The Parson sighed and concluded that he had invited the mob and wondered what he was going to do about it.

He went off to the study, which had not been invaded, while his wife returned to the sitting-room, determined to make the best of a bad job.

The female part of the mob was very mad because they had not overruled the Parson's order and brought something to eat.

They liked good things, and wanted everybody to think that what they made was the best, and every old gal there was sorry she had not brought a specimen of her handiwork just to show off.

"Might have known the Parson would forget to tell Mis' Rich'son," snorted Sister Higgins. "She's awful embarrassed, I know, but she might have pretended she was glad to see us."

"It's all his fault, anyhow," said Deacon Smith's wife. "Men ain't no good anyhow."

"Pretty good for an old gal that's had three husbands," said a voice in the southeast corner.

There was a great tittering at this, and Sister Smith sat down very red in the face.

Just then the Parson's wife returned, received her company most graciously, and proceeded to put them all at their ease.

She did not say anything about grub, but kept the ball rolling in the matter of talk until all hands forgot the queer reception they had received.

Master Dick could have caused the assembly to break up in the biggest kind of a row if he had wanted, but that would hardly do, and so he held his jaw and enjoyed himself in other ways.

After all the gang had a pleasant evening of it, even if they were not fed, and as the cranks dropped out after a short stay, those who remained had a good time.

"Dear me, I hope they won't come like that another night," muttered Mrs. Richardson, when the folks had all gone. "They must think I am terribly inhospitable."

"After all, ma," said Dick, "what was the use of feeding them anyhow? They had all had their suppers."

"Of course, but it's the custom to have cake and coffee or something like that."

"Bother custom," said Dick with a laugh.

The Parson soon forgot all about the surprise party, but Dick found other things for him to think of.

Meantime, however, there were lots of fellows in town for that young scamp to play rackets upon, and he thought he might as well give his poor old dad a rest.

The next day as he was hanging around the store in the village, Squire Muddle came along, his umbrella under his arm, a big red handkerchief sticking out of his coat-tail pocket, and his broad brimmed hat pushed back from his high forehead.

"Good-morning, old Hunks. How goes it?"

The Squire looked up in surprise at this salutation, but saw no one but Dick, and he had evidently not said anything.

"What say?" asked the Squire.

"I said good-morning, you old fraud," said a voice behind him.

The Squire turned, but there was no one within a hundred feet of him.

"Wow-wow-gr!" barked a dog right under his feet.

He jumped, struck out with his umbrella, and ran up the steps of the store.

"Folks have no business to let dogs run around without muzzles on 'em these days," he remarked, looking for the dog.

Then he went inside, Dick following and taking up his position on a barrel.

"Hello, old Sandbank. How is sugar?" the Squire seemed to say to the storekeeper.

"What's that?" asked the latter, coming forward.

"Hallo, old stick in the mud, what do you want?" the Squire heard the man say.

"What say?" he demanded, wondering if he had heard right.

"How's axle grease, butter, as you call it?"

"Really, Squire, I don't think you ought

"Get out, old fourteen ounces to the pound, you're no good."

"What say?" asked the squire, wondering who had spoken.

The storekeeper began to get mad at being addressed in this style.

"Made up any cat sausages lately, old man?"

"What say? What you talking about? I didn't ask you for sassages."

"Do you want to insult me in my own store, Squire?"

"Ah, go on, old lightweight."

"What say?" put in the Squire again, in his high key.

"I declare, Squire Muddle, it's more than I'll stand, being called such names."

"What's the matter now?" asked the Squire. "I ain't said nothing."

"Go on you old liar."

"What say? Who's a lawyer?"

"That's what I want to know, You called me a liar and I won't have it."

"Never called you nothing."

"Yes, you did. I'll leave it to Dick there."

"Somebody called some one a liar, but I couldn't tell who it was," said Dick. "I was nearly asleep."

"Give that boy an apple, Jones."

"All right, Squire. Here you are, Dick."

Dick got his apple and the boss said:

"Five cents for that one, Squire. Apples is dear this year."

"Five cents for what?"

"That apple."

"I hain't had none."

"No, you told me to give it to Dick."

"Didn't neither."

"Yes, you did, you old stuff."

"What's that, Squire? Who's a stuff?"

"Go to Jericho, old water vinegar."

The boss thumped his fist on the counter and said:

"See here, Squire, I won't have you casting reflections on me like that."

"What say? Who's elected? What are you talking about, anyhow?"

Dick was getting outside of his apple and didn't seem to be taking stock of anything else.

"How's that cherry leaf tea of yours, old Profit and Loss?"

"What say?" was the squire's reply.

"I say I won't have you casting reflections on my business. Do you want any thing or don't you?"

"Yes, I do, I want a bag o' flour and—wall, something else, but you've clean druv it out of my head with your gab. Don't know what you are talking about anyhow."

"Was it sugar, Squire?" asked the grocer, seeing a chance to make something and forgetting his wrath.

"No."

"Maybe it was dried apples. I have got some fine ones."

"No, I don't think it was."

"Well, did you have a list?"

"H'm, yes, pears to me I did. Let me see, where did I put it?"

"In your hat, you old soaker."

"What say?" snapped the Squire, while the grocer looked surprised.

Then the Squire put his hand up to his head.

"Peep—peep—peep—peep!"

You would have thought he had a whole brood of young chicks in his hat.

"Hallo, where's them chickens?"

"In your hat, Squire. Funny place to carry 'm, ain't it?"

"Hain't got no chicks in my hat."

"Peep-peep. Cluck-cluck."

"Pears to me you've got the old hen there too, Squire. Ain't you 'fraid they'll get smothered?"

"Cut-cut-cut-ker-dar-cut!" sounded from the Squire's hat.

"Blowed if the old hen hasn't laid an egg in your hat, Squire."

Several customers had come in and they all heard the cackling.

The Squire took off his hat in a hurry and some of the gang actually expected to see some little chickens jump out.

Nothing of the sort happened, of course, and all hands were mystified.

No one paid any attention to Dick who sat on a barrel looking as innocent as a marble cherub.

"What did you do with the chickens, Squire?"

"Gosh! Where'd they get to?"

"Hain't had no chickens," muttered the Squire, who was as much puzzled as any one.

Then Dick came out where everybody could see him.

All hands saw him, and any one would have sworn that he didn't move a muscle.

"Cluck, cluck, peep, peep!"

"Tell you you have got some chickens, Squire."

"You've got 'em in your pocket."

"Peep, peep, peep!"

"Look out, you'll step on 'em."

"It's a shame to carry them that way."

They all got after the Squire, and he had to turn out his pockets before they would believe that he did not have some little chicks in them.

In his absent-mindedness, he forgot all about a little private flask he had, and that came to light among other things.

The grocer and the customers laughed, the Squire got very red in the face, and Dick took in the whole show without turning a hair.

The chickens had escaped somehow or another, but one old gal explained it by saying:

If you had told them it was Dick they would not have credited it.

Why, Dick Richardson had not said a word.

"Go on, old chalky milk!"

That was another reflection.

"Really now, Squire, if you don't stop insulting—"

"What say?"

"Brick dust for red pepper. Yah!"

The gang began to laugh, and the Squire forgot what he was going to buy.

He was absent-minded enough at the best of times, but this morning he was more rattled than ever.

He laughed with the rest, not knowing what it was all about.

what he had come for, and Master Dick did not enlighten him.

Now I am going to tell you about what happened a few days later, the Parson being mostly concerned therein.

Sadie, the hired girl, happened to be taken sick and she was given a vacation until she got better.

In the meantime her place was supplied by a big, strapping, raw-boned, hard-muscled, heavy-listed lady from Ireland by the name of Norah.

She was a fair cook and general house-keeper, but she had to be watched or she would let things slide.

Moreover she had a temper of her own and several that had belonged to others



She was so mad that for several moments she could not say a word. Meanwhile the Parson wrote on, unconscious of the storm about to break over his head. "Well, what are you waiting for? Stand on your head, I tell you." That broke the spell and Norah's wrath burst its bonds.

"Them chicks is 'very deceiving. You think they're under foot and they ain't in a rod of you. Like as not the Squire took some of that stuff out o' the bottle and thought the chicks was in his hat when they was out in the yard."

That was another one on the Squire, for he had declared all along that he had no chickens.

"Well, Squire, you ought to treat on that."

"What say?"

"Go on, you old wooden nutmeg seller!"

The Squire was evidently indulging in his reflections again.

It was worse this time, as more people heard him.

"Put niggers' heels in your molasses, don't you?"

"What say?" came that invariable query.

"What do I say? What do you say, you mean? I don't put niggers' heels in my molasses."

"Well, who said you did?"

"You did."

"No, I didn't nuther."

"Oh, Squire!" said all hands.

They could have sworn that he said it.

That made Jones madder than ever.

"If you wasn't a justice, Squire Muddle, I'd swat you in the jaw for saying things like that to me, but you needn't bother to think what you was going to buy, for I don't want no such customer as you anyhow."

Then the others all got at the Squire again.

"Really now, you oughtn't to hurt the man's feelings."

"A joke's a joke, but that's carrying it too far."

Then the wise old gal put in a clincher as follows:

"Never mind the Squire, Mr. Jones. Reckon he's been drinking too much out o' that bottle."

Then they all laughed and the Squire joined in, although he had no idea what they were giggling at.

"That's pretty good, say it again," he said.

"You're all a lot of chumps."

"What say? I didn't—"

The chumps, as he was supposed to have called them, hustled him out of the store in short order, and he forgot all about

tacked on to it, to judge by its size, and she never let an opportunity of showing it pass by unembraced.

Well, it happened one morning that the Parson's study was being tidied up without any reference to his convenience whatever.

Women don't consult men anyhow when they want to sweep or dust, and the Parson had to vacate.

He took up his position in the dining-room and fondly supposed that he would not be interrupted in his work.

That was all the poor man knew about Friday house cleaning.

In the course of half an hour Mrs. Richardson said:

"Norah, you'd better go into the dining-room and sweep up around the hearth, it's very dirty. Don't disturb Mr. Richardson any more than you can help."

Dick was in hearing when this order was given and he had a chance for some fun.

He skipped off and took up a favorable position just outside the window.

The Parson was writing away like a good fellow when Norah came in with a broom in her hand.

She began to sweep up around the

hearth without saying a word so as not to bother the Parson.

Just about the time she finished she heard the Parson say:

"*Norah, stand on your head.*"

She looked up in surprise and stared hard at the Parson.

The latter went right on with his work, but added:

"*Stand on your head, I tell you.*"

The big servant girl looked at the Parson in surprise, rage and indignation.

She was so mad that for several moments she could not say a word.

Meanwhile the Parson wrote on, unconscious of the storm about to break over his head.

"*Well, what are you waiting for? Stand on your head, I tell you.*"

That broke the spell and Norah's wrath burst its bonds.

PART XIV.

WHAT big Irishwoman wasn't going to stand any nonsense, even if it did come from the Parson.

Stand on her head, indeed!

Well, she guessed not.

"Shtand on me head, is it?" she demanded. "Begob, then, I'll tache ye to insult a dacint Irish girrul, ye ould villain."

With that she took a firm hold on the broom handle and raised it above her head.

Swish!

Thump!

If the Parson had not happened to raise his head just then, he would have caught it solid.

As it was, the broom just grazed his nose and struck the table a dandy old crack.

The sheets of paper went flying, the inkstand was knocked silly and the table fairly shook.

Norah grabbed the broom so as to get in another whack.

Up jumped the Parson in great surprise, not to say terror.

Whack!

The broom struck the table, smashed a plate and sent the pieces flying.

"Take that, ye impudent ould villain! How dar' ye insult a lady—bad manners to ye!"

"Is the woman crazy?" gasped the Parson.

"Tell me to shtand on me head, will ye—me, a lady, ye disreputable ould scarecrow ye?"

Bang!

The broom gave the table another whack, and Norah thought the Parson was getting it.

He might have done so had he remained, but he did not.

The woman was clearly crazy in his eyes, and the sooner he got away the better for him.

Out of the door he flew, leaving Norah boss of the situation.

"The cheek of him!" she muttered.

"Faix, I'll tell the misthress, and he'll catch it. Stand on me head, indeed!"

"*Get out, you bog-totter!*"

Norah looked around, for that was the Parson's voice sure enough.

"*Go hang yourself up to dry, you're too green.*"

The voice was in the hall, the Parson having left the door open.

"Oh, I am, am I? Well, you just come in here and see if I am or not, you ould curmudgeon."

"*Go step on your own feet, they're big enough.*"

"Yes, and they're big enough to crush ye, too, ye ould fraud."

"*Ah, go sew a button on your lip, you're too fresh.*"

"Niver mind how fresh I am. I'll salt ye if I get at ye."

"*Three cheers for old England, you terrier.*"

That was too much for Norah, and she got her back up.

Out into the hall she dashed, intending to fairly paralyze the poor old Parson.

She killed a couple of flies on the wall with her broom, and that's all she did do.

The Parson was not there, having returned to his study.

Norah met Mrs. Richardson in the hall a

moment later, and bitterly complained of the Parson.

"Sure, I think it's too bad that yer husband can't behave himself and him a minister," she began.

"Why, what can you mean?" demanded the lady.

"Faix, I'll have no man tellin' me to stand an me head, aven if he do be wan av the clergy, and thin tellin' me I'm too fresh and givin' three cheers for ould England."

"You must be mistaken, Norah," said Mrs. Richardson. "My husband wouldn't do such a thing, he is too dignified."

"All the same I heard him tell me so, and not wanst but three or four times, and then he said I had big feet, and called me a tarrier, and all thim names, and I won't stand it."

"But you surely must be mistaken. Mr. Richardson would not talk like that to any one."

"Deed, ma'am, and yez might as well call me a liar and have done wid it," sputtered Norah, "for I h'ard him wid me two ears, and av yez don't belave me yez needn't, but I won't live in a place where the mather insults a dacint girrul like that, and that's all there is about it."

With that Norah flounced away and went up to her own room to pack up and go.

She did go, too, and that day was her last in the house, for in half an hour she had her money in her fist and was off on a job-hunting expedition.

Mrs. Richardson interviewed the Parson and told him that Norah was going away on account of having been insulted by him.

"Really, my dear, I do not understand it," said the puzzled man, "but I am glad she is going. I would not have felt safe in the same house with such a virago. It is my belief that she is crazy."

"She said you told her to stand on her head and that after that you called her all sorts of names."

"Really, my dear, you should not have listened to her," cried the horrified Parson. "Why, I did not say the first word and she drove me from the room with a broom. It's fortunate that she has gone. We might all have been murdered in our beds."

"She didn't say anything about the broom and I never noticed any signs of insanity about her, but, of course, she must have made up the whole story and I'm glad we got rid of her so easily."

Dick was also glad, although he had not looked for such an end to his little snap.

He didn't like Norah, and was quite well satisfied to have her bounce herself in that style.

Sadie came back in a day or so, and things went along in their old style. Master Dick went on in his old style too, and managed to get fun out of most anything.

One of his snaps about this time was played off on Pete, the colored man of all work about the place.

It was a warm forenoon, and Dick, in thin trousers and tennis shirt, was lying in a hammock under the shade of the trees near the house, doing his best to keep cool by thinking of nothing in particular, and not very much of that.

The Parson, in slippers and a long duster, was walking up and down on the piazza, passing the open window of his study every now and then, engaged in thinking up the points of his next sermon.

Mrs. Richardson was not in it, and that was fortunate for Dick's little plan.

Presently along came Pete, barefooted, clad only in light overalls and cotton shirt and wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat on his head. As he passed along the walk just below the piazza he heard the Parson say:

"*Pete, go bring two pails of water.*"

"Yesser, dreckly, sah," answered that prompt coon.

Then he went away and soon returned with two big buckets, both full and slopping over.

"*Set them down and get two more, Pete.*" was the next order.

"A'right, sah, right away, sah," and off went Pete on his errand.

He soon came back, puffing and sweating, and stood waiting for orders.

The Parson was at the other end of the piazza with his back to the coon, but he nevertheless said:

"*Fetch a couple more, Pete.*"

"Don' b'lebe dere am any mo' buckets, sah."

"Yes, there are. Go find them, you black scarecrow!"

"Deah me, de boss am gettin' wuss an' wuss," sighed Pete, as he went away. "Wondah if it am any use ter spoke to de missus?"

After awhile he came back with two tin pails brimming over with water, and set them down beside the others.

"Go get some more," was all the Parson said.

"Ain't any mo' buckets, boss."

"Then get a washtub, stupid!"

"Yesser, anyfing yo' like," and off went Pete, with another big sigh.

"Wha' de mischief he gwine ter do wif all dat watah, I like to know? Specs he am clean gone crazy dis mo'nin fo' shuah."

The Parson passed those buckets of water several times, but was too absent-minded to notice them, being intent on getting his sermon into shape.

And then, not being a Baptist, he probably did not take much stock in water, anyhow, except as an occasional gurgle for a dry throat. After an interval of some minutes, Pete returned lugging a big washtub nearly full of water, which slopped and splashed over him as he walked.

"Set it down, you donkey!"

"Yas'r, obco'se. Yo'don't spect I'se gwine ter stan' yer holdin' dish yer heaby tub, does yo'?"

"None of your back talk, you black cynocephalus."

"Wow! Goodness, what am dat? Neber heerd a wo'd like dat befoah."

"Now wash off this veranda. Never mind me at all."

"A'right, sah, jus' as yo say, sah; don' make no diffence to me, sah."

"Take the buckets first and give it a good sousing."

"Bery good, sah," said Pete, picking up a bucket.

"And don't mind me a bit, I tell you."

"A'right, sah, I won', jus' a lilly bit sah."

Splash!

Swash!

The Parson had just turned to go over the track again when the water struck the floor with a resounding splash.

His revery was broken and he looked up in surprise, but continued walking, absent-minded.

Then Pete grabbed up the second bucket and let it fly.

"That's right, Peter; now this end."

Pete grabbed the third pail and the water flew all over the Parson's feet.

He had on slippers and thin socks, and of course he got a ducking.

"Hi—hi, what are you about?" he yelled jumping back.

That did not trouble Pete any, and he annexed another bucket and let the contents fly.

The Parson got it again, for Pete had followed him up.

"Here, here, stop, what are you about, who told you to wash the piazza, go away!" stormed the Parson, getting very much excited and retreating to a dry spot.

Pete had been told not to mind him and he went right ahead with his washing process.

"Now this end, you idiot!" said the Parson, in direct opposition to his previous remark.

Pete had seized another bucket, and he gave it a toss, sending the water to the very end of the veranda.

The Parson was drenched, for he wasn't sudden enough in getting out of the way.

He made a dive for the window of his study, but by that time Pete had yanked hold of the last bucket.

Swish!

Swash!

Splash!

The Parson got it in the neck and gasped for breath.

"Now the tub, Pete. Let her have it good and strong!"

"What are you doing? Stop it, I say! You are wetting me all over. Go away, I tell you. How dare you act in such a crazy fashion? Stop it at once, I tell you!"

The poor man was greatly excited, and was jumping up and down and gesticulating in the most frantic manner.

He was now in front of the long window leading into his study.

Pete, resolving to obey orders or burst, grabbed up the big wash-tub, planked it down on the piazza and upset it.

The flood caught the Parson as he stood in the door and washed him off his feet.

He entered his study as he had never entered it before, on his back, and the water went with him.

In fact, he was fairly carried in on the tide, and it bore him high and dry clear over to the opposite wall.

He sputtered and choked and gasped and sneezed and had a tough time generally.

When he got up, soaked from head to

one, only the wet piazza and the water lying in puddles all around and running over on the walk.

It would be cooler after that, of course, but the Parson wasn't thinking of that just then.

He was thinking that he ought to put on dry clothes, and trying to recollect the great point he had made in smashing his opponents when interrupted by the deluge.

"Dear me, dear me, things seem to grow worse instead of better," he sighed. "That fellow, Peter, does the most idiotic things, and now I suppose he will be ready to swear that I told him to do it."

That was precisely what happened, and very naturally.

The Parson sneezed two or three times and then said, sternly:

"Peter, do you expect to go to heaven when you leave this world?"

"Am gwine no place else, sah," declared Pete, with an air of conviction. "I'se a good Mefodis' brudder, I is, an' I spects ter go right stret to glory when I dies. I does, indeed, Pa'son."

"You will never get there, Peter, if you tell such awful lies, never."

"Scuse me, sah, I don't tell no lies," protested Pete. "Wouldn't tell lies fo' nuffin, sah. I don't see wha' call yo'm got to say I tell lies, Pa'son."

"Didn't you say I told you to wash off the stoop?"



"Shtand on me head, is it?" she demanded. "Begob, then, I'll tache ye to insult a dacint Irish girrul, ye ould villain." With that she took a firm hold on the broom handle and raised it above her head. Swish! Thump!

foot, he found the floor all wet and scarcely a dry spot on which to stand.

For the summer time there was a matting on the floor, and so it did not matter much if it did get wet, but the Parson was nevertheless very much rattled.

He went out upon the piazza to give that coon a talking to, but there was no Pete to be seen.

He had been given his orders and had dusted.

"Now, take away those things and let the thing get dry."

That is what he heard, just after he had emptied the tub.

All he had to do was to obey, of course, for he was great on doing what he was told.

For reasons best known to himself, Master Dick also skipped.

There was more shade on the other side of the house, there was a book in his room that he wanted, or something of that sort.

At any rate he made himself less prominent a feature in the landscape at that particular point of view—sloped, in other words.

When the Parson came out he saw no

Along came Pete on his way to do some bit of work or another about the place, after having put away the buckets.

The Parson hailed him as soon as he appeared with:

"Peter, come here. I want you."

"Now I spects I'se gotter sweep dat watah up, affah him tellin' me jus' ter leabe it lay," muttered the coon.

"Do you see me, Peter?" asked the Parson, sternly, as Pete stopped in front of him.

"Yas'r, I'se lookin' at yo', sah."

"Do you observe how wet I am, Peter, I might say soaked?"

"Yas'r, yo' am bery wet; looks 's if yo' mought been in swimmin', but don' yo' recollect dat yo' tol' me nevah to min' yo' tall, but jus' go right on sousin' de watah all ober de stoop?"

The Parson was literally paralyzed with astonishment.

Pete had said just exactly what he had said he would.

"Do you mean to tell me that I told you to wash off the stoop?" he gasped.

"Dat am de bery ting exackly wha' yo' tol' me, Pa'son, right yer in dis bery spot."

"Yas'r, an' so yo' did, right yer, an' tol' me not ter min' yo' jus' a little bit, an' sen' me affah fibe or six buckets ob watah an' den de wash tub, an' tol' me ter gib 'em a good washin', clar to glory yo' did, Pa'son, an' dere ain' no lie 'bout it."

There was no doubt that Pete was sincere in his protestations, but the Parson was just as positive that no such circumstances as related by the coon had happened.

He turned and went away with a sigh, failing to hear Pete's last remark:

"If yo' don' b'leve it ax Mass Dick. He was yer an' knowed all 'bout it."

Perhaps if the Parson had heard he would have had a new light on the affair.

The very mention of his son's name would have caused him to suspect that the young fellow had been up to mischief, though in what manner it would have been hard for him to state.

His wife was not at home, and, as he did not see Dick, he did not think of him, and so he went off and changed his clothes and there the matter ended.

Dick chuckled softly to himself as he saw his poor old dad go up-stairs after trying to

lay out Pete, and then he kind of hung around so as to give the coon one on his own account at the first opportunity.

Half an hour or so later as Pete was passing the well at the back of the house he heard Dick call to him:

"Hi, Pete, hello, Pete."

He looked all around but could see no one.

"Whar am yo', Marse Dick?" he asked.

"Down the well. Come get me out."

"Fo' de lan' sakes, how dat boy get down de well, I like to know?"

"Fell down. Send down the bucket."

Pete leaned over the well curb and looked down into the cool, twilight depths, but could see nothing.

"Whar am yo', Marse Dick?"

"Down here. Can't you see me? I can see you all right."

"No, I can't, but yo' am in de dahk, dat's why."

"Don't stand there chinning while I am shivering here. Send down the bucket."

You could not have convinced Pete that the young fellow was not down there in the water, even if you had shown him Dick standing behind some bee-hives not more than ten feet distant.

The sound of Dick's voice came up from below, and although Pete could not see him he knew that he was there.

"Don' yo' get excited, Marse Dick, an' I sin' dat bucket right down to yo' dis minnit," he called down.

The bucket was lowered by a chain which passed over a drum in the top of the well-house, and Pete began to lower it at once, turning a crank and letting the chain run out.

"Hab yo' got it, Marse Dick?" he asked, taking a rest.

"A little lower, Pete."

"A' right, Marse Dick. I sen' it down to yo' dreckly."

Pete gave three or four more turns of the crank and then called down:

"How am dat, Marse Dick?"

"Lower yet. I can't reach it."

"Fo' goodness sake, I neber 'sposed dat well was so deep," sputtered Pete, turning away till the chain was all out.

"How am dat?" he yelled down the well.

"Can't you let out five or six feet more?" asked the voice in the well.

"Five or six foot mo'l" gasped Pete.

"Why, bless yo' haht, de bucket am in de watah now."

"Well, I can't reach it."

"Wha' fo' yo' can't?"

"I'm on the bottom."

That was too much for Pete.

If Dick was at the bottom of the well and talking to him up through the water, there must be something wrong.

That coon jumped back from the well in a hurry, and began winding up the bucket as fast as he could.

"Good lan', if he am down dere, why don' he swim to de top? What am de use of staying undah watah all dat time? He'll get drowned, sho' yo' bo'n."

"What's that, Pete?"

That was Dick's voice sure enough, and turning, Pete saw the young fellow sitting on a bench near the hives.

"How'd yo' get up, Marse Dick?"

"Get up where?"

"Out ob de well."

"Haven't been in the well."

"Yas, yo' hab, an' I sen' down de bucket fo' yo', an' de chain wasn' long 'nuff."

"Pete," said Dick quietly, "you've been drinking. I wouldn't let pop see you, or you might get bounced."

Then that young rascal got up and walked away as cool as ice, leaving Pete all broken up with surprise.

"Wull, ef dat amn't de mos' mysteriores-est ting I eber see!" he gasped. "Fust dat boy am down at de bottom ob de well an' den he am on de bench, an' I neber took my eyes off'n de well all de time. Clar' fo' goodness dere mus' be ghostses roun' dish yer place."

PART XV.

OUR Dick continued to enjoy himself during the warm spell, and while others were puffing and sweating and roasting, he was as cool as a cucumber with the dew still on it, and took no end of comfort as well as fun out of life.

The Parson experienced no lasting ill from the wetting he had received at the hands of Pete, but Dick gave him a rest for a spell and proceeded to work the other members of the household.

The first one he tackled, when he felt like having a lark, was the hired man, Jonas, the slab-sided Yankee who juggled with the potatoes and corn and beets, et cetera, in the garden patch back of the house.

Dick was lying in the hammock, his favorite spot on a warm afternoon, and the Parson sitting in a reclining chair on the lawn, reading a book, when Jonas came by with a brush and a pail of whitewash.

He had been adorning the piggery, as they call it nowadays, and was on his way to the barn.

"Hello, Jonas; oh, Jonas, you long-legged crank!"

"What say, Pa'son?" asked the man, stopping.

"Come here, you gawk, and don't stand there looking like a fool."

"Don't know what's got hold o' the Pa'son lately," muttered Jonas. "He didn't useter talk like that."

However, he went towards the good man, who seemed to say as he approached:

"Give this chair a coat of that stuff, Jonas."

"Yes, sir, right away."

"Do it now, you thick-head."

"But you're sittin' in it, Pa'son."

"Never mind if I am, you gawk."

That settled it with Jonas.

He did not like being called a gawk, and he always obeyed orders.

He began at the back of that chair and gave it a liberal dose of whitewash.

"That's right, slap her on thick."

The back of the chair being of cane, the whitewash went through, of course.

The Parson did not notice this until Jonas, giving the brush an extra flap, sent a squirt of whitewash right on his book.

Then he jumped up in astonishment and saw what Jonas was about.

Master Dick sneaked out of that hammock and around the corner in a hurry.

"What are you doing, Jonas?"

"Whitewashing."

"I should say so," muttered the Parson, twisting his head around and looking at the back of his black coat.

"Only doing what yew told me, Pa'son."

"What! Whitewashing the chair with me in it! Nonsense."

"Reckon it's kind o' foolish myself, Pa'son, but that's jest what yew told me."

"Nonsense!"

"Yas, that's what I think."

"But I never told you to do it at all."

"Oh, Pa'son! Haow can yu say that?"

"Just look at my coat! I should think you'd have more sense than that."

"Gotter du what yu tell me, Pa'son, hain't I?"

"But I never told you to do such a foolish thing as that. Just look at me."

"Yas, yu du look funny and no mistake, just like yu just got out o' Sing Sing," and Jonas began to laugh.

"What do you mean by laughing, you foolish fellow?" stormed the Parson.

"Haven't you any sense at all?"

Just then out came the Parson's wife, hearing a disturbance on the lawn.

"Why, Mr. Richardson, just look at your coat. What have you been doing?"

"Ask Jonas," returned the poor man as snappishly as he could, being pretty even-tempered generally.

"He told me to do it, Miss Rich'son," explained Jonas.

"Told you to whitewash his back?"

"Yes'm."

"Nonsense!"

"Yas, that's what I told him, but he said to go right on."

"Didn't you know any better yourself?"

"Wall, he said ter whitewash the chair with him in it, and o' course the stuff slopped. Yer can't help that."

Mrs. Richardson looked at her husband in pity.

"I do think you do the craziest things lately," she remarked. "You had better go and have that coat sponged at once."

"I do crazy things!" gasped the Parson.

"Why, it isn't me at all, my dear. It's Jonas and Peter and Sarah, and—and everybody, in fact."

"Didn't you tell Jonas to whitewash the chair with you in it?"

"Certainly not."

"Naow, Pa'son, yer know yer did and that I wouldn't tell a lie for nawthin'. I swan, Mis' Rich'son, he—"

"There, there, Jonas, that will do," interposed the lady. "Go put away that whitewash and get a tubful of rain-water."

"Yes'm," drawled the man as he went away.

"Dear, dear, Mr. Richardson," wailed the lady once more, "why will you persist in doing these absurd things? It's really too bad."

"Of me, my dear?" asked the Parson. "Why, I don't do them at all, it's the people about the house. I never saw such a lot of idiots. I can't have any peace at all with their goings on, my dear."

"But they only do as you tell them to, Mr. Richardson."

"As I tell them to do! Now, is it likely, is it reasonable, is it in keeping with my character as a clergyman and as a sedate, quiet gentleman, to order the servants to do the absurd things which you see them do?"

The Parson was wound up now, and could have gone on without notes for an hour or more, getting in his thirdly, fourthly, and to conclude in their order and winding up with a sockdologer of a finish that would have left his opponents nothing to stand upon.

Mrs. Richardson was not in the mood to listen to a sermon, however, and she cut the Parson off short with the remark:

"You know Jonas always speaks the truth, Parson, and you know you are very absent-minded and—"

"Yes, but my mind would have to be entirely absent, I would not have any mind in fact, if I did the ridiculous things attributed to me. I can't understand it. Has anybody seen anything of Richard?"

"Oh, yes, you must accuse that innocent boy, who is always so quiet and never makes a noise," retorted Dick's mother.

"That's right, abuse the poor dear when he isn't here to defend himself. That's always the way. You wish to conceal your own absent-mindedness by blaming poor Dick, the only one in all the family that never does anything out of the way."

The Parson sighed and went away with the whitewash still on his coat, for he knew that once his wife got upon the defense there was no use trying to stop her.

"I didn't say Richard didn't," he muttered, as he went away, "but, somehow or other, that boy is generally around when anything happens. I never caught him in any mischief yet, but it goes on just the same. I can't understand it, I really can't."

"Guess I'll give the governor a rest for a spell," chuckled Dick, who had heard the discussion. "There is such a thing as rubbing it in, and dad is so innocent that it's a shame to give him too many rackets."

It happened that during that same afternoon Dick's mother was sitting on the piazza in the shade reading, when she fell asleep.

The book was one by the Duchess, most likely, and that was reason enough for going to sleep.

It was near a long, open window leading to the sitting-room, the windows being all like doors on the piazza side of the house.

Dick was around, of course, though not in sight, when along came Pete.

"Pete, you Pete, come here."

"Yes ma'yam," said Pete.

"Go in there and play on the piano."

Pete knew as much about playing on the piano as a cow does of the procession of the equinoxes.

"Wha' dat, missus?" he gasped.

In fact he was not quite sure if he had heard correctly.

"Go in and play the piano. I want to be amused."

"Lawd bless yo', ma'am, I don't know nuffin 'bout playin' de peranner."

"Go on in and try. Make a noise anyhow."

"Reckon I broke de ting, ma'am, if I tech it," said Pete, trying to get out of it.

"No, you won't. Go in there and hammer blazes out of it."

"Yes'm," said Pete, wondering that the lady should give him such an order.

The piano happened to be open when Pete went in.

He tackled it rough handed and with both fists.

The first movement sounded like the gamut struck by lightning.

The next was like three cats and four dogs in fits all at once.

Then Pete got down in the bass and had a regular imitation thunder-storm all to himself.

Mrs. Richardson had started at the first sound but had not fully awakened.

The next chord made her jump and utter an aristocratic scream.

"Stop, stop, for goodness sake stop!" bawled the Parson.

"Peter! come away from that piano this minute," shrieked Mrs. Richardson.

Pete went right on with his music, imagining that the folks liked it.

"Do go in there and make him stop," said the Parson's wife to Jonas.

"Make him stop, ma'am?"

"Yes."

"All right," and in walked the hired man.

"Stop that there playin', yu slab-sided nigger yu, or I'll break yure jaw, du yu hear me?"

"Wha' dat yo' say, sah?" asked Pete.

'long an' yo' spoke ter me jes' as plain as plain."

"I haven't said a word. I haven't seen you until just this minute—I have been asleep," protested the lady.

"Aren't you a trifle absent-minded, my dear?" insinuated the Parson. "Peter always speaks the truth, you know."

Jonas snickered, Sadie smiled, Mrs. Richardson frowned, and Dick looked as innocent as usual.

"Go to your work, Peter," said the lady. "I never said a word about your playing on the piano. The idea!"

Then she flounced away and the congregation dispersed, the Parson forgetting to



Pete was banging away at that instrument for all he was worth. He worked with both hands, and if he could have got his feet near enough he would have used them. The noise he made was something terrible.

The thunderstorm movement woke her up and she jumped to her feet.

Pete had by this time entered into the full spirit of the thing, and was just carried away by the grandeur of his own music.

He was just giving that piano fits and making no end of a racket.

The Parson's wife ran to the window and looked in.

The Parson was doing the same at the door, wondering what in thunder all the noise was about.

Sadie, Jonas and Dick were looking in at the other window and holding on to their ears.

Pete was banging away on that instrument for all he was worth.

He worked with both hands, and if he could have got his feet near enough he would have used them.

The noise he made was something terrible.

The squalling of forty cats, the bawling of a dozen hucksters, the caterwauling of ten babies, the braying of a whole drove of donkeys, all these combined could not have made more of a racket than that coon made.

pausing in the midst of a *crescendo* movement.

"Stop that playin', I tell yu, if yu don't want a funeral at yure haouse."

"Who say I sh'd stop it, h'm? Am it youse, yo' ole pie eatah?"

"Yas, it is, and I want yu to du it tew, and don't yu furgit it."

"Don't take no o'dahs fom yo', sah—yo' ain't nobody."

"Peter!" cried Mrs. Richardson, now that she could make herself heard, "come away from that piano this minute."

"Yas'm," and Peter obeyed.

"What do you mean by pounding on it like that?"

"On'y done wha' yo' tol' me ter, missus."

The lady was paralyzed, figuratively speaking.

"What?"

"Yo' done tell me ter play on de peranner, missus, an' I tol' yo' I couldn', an' yo' sayed dat didn' make no diff'ence, but ter jest go in an' make all de noise I could."

"Why, Peter, I never said anything of the sort."

"Oh, missus! hope ter die if yo' didn'. Yo' was settin' on de pizarrer, an' I come

suggest that Dick might have had something to do with the disturbance.

Mrs. Richardson was a bit rattled over the circumstance, for she had always insisted that Pete told the truth, and that if he said a thing was so, it was as good as seeing it in print.

She didn't know what to think of the whole business, but she never thought to connect her innocent son with it, and that's how she didn't get at the truth of the matter.

As for Dick himself, it had grown cooler by that time, and so he started off for the village to have some fun with the boys.

It wasn't safe to work any more rackets around the house that afternoon and as Dick could enjoy himself in one place as well as in another, he was all right and in no fear of being found out.

A day or so after this Pete had to take the horse and buggy and go over to the next town with the Parson, who was going to remain all night.

Dick went along to be company for the coon on the return as it would be nearly dark when they came back.

Pete thought it was fine fun to be driven by Dick and he felt as proud as a peacock.

They started back at dusk and for awhile everything went along smoothly.

It was beginning to grow dark, the moon not having yet arisen, when they came to a churchyard.

There were gravestones just on the other side of the wall, quite near the road and beyond were some monuments standing up white and glistening against the background of trees.

Pete looked askance at the tombs and began to whistle and wish that Dick would drive faster.

"Peter, oh, Peter!"

The voice seemed to come from one of the gravestones nearest the road.

Dick was driving slowly, when Pete gave a jump.

"What's the matter with you, Pete, got the itch?"

"Can't yo' drive fastah, Marse Dick?" asked Pete, his teeth beginning to chatter.

"Peter, I say, why don't you answer me?"

"Yo' ain' dribin' half fas' nuff," groaned Pete. "Hurry up, can't yo'? We neber get home ef yo' don'."

"I'll come after you if you don't say something."

"Yas'r, what yo' want?" gasped Pete, shaking all over.

"What do I want?" asked Dick. "I don't want anything. What's the matter with you anyhow?"

"Dribe on, Marse Dick," stammered Pete. "Don' yo' see we am right by a grabe yard?"

"We want you, Pete, we want you."

"Oh, lan' ob glory, Marse Dick, why don' yo' dribe on like I ax yo'?" groaned Pete.

Dick stopped, looked at Pete and asked: "What's the matter with you, Pete? You look rattled."

"Come on, Pete, we're waiting."

"Goodness gracious, Marse Dick, don' yo' see whar we is? Dere am de grabe-yahd!"

"Well, it won't hurt you, will it? What's the matter?"

"We'll come and get you if you don't hurry, you black rascal!"

Poor Pete's hair stood on end and his limbs shook till he set the wagon springs to rattling.

"Fo' goodness sakes, dribe on, Marse Dick! Dey'll get me if yo' don' look out."

"Who'll get you, Pete?"

"Dem ghostses in de grabe-yard."

"Nonsense!"

"Yas, dey will; dey're aftah me now. Didn't yo' hear dem?"

"Hear what?"

"Heah dem ghostses callin'?"

"You're rattled, Pete."

"No, I amn't. I heah dem jus' as plain as—"

"Come on, boys. Let's go and get the coon."

The voice was deep and solemn, and poor Pete's heart gave a jump.

"Hurry up, fo' goodness sake!" he yelled, grabbing the whip and giving Fan a belt.

The mare started up suddenly, and Pete fell off the seat.

"Now, then, fellows, we'll get him sure."

"Fo' goodness sake, sabe me, sabe me, Marse Dick!" screamed that badly rattled coon.

Dick stopped and said:

"What's the matter, Pete?"

"Dem ghostses I tol' yo'. Didn't yo' heah dem?"

"Ah, go on. There are no ghosts."

"Yas, dey is. I heerd dem in de grabe-yard. Dey wan' me."

"Ah, go on."

"Yes, dey do, I tell youse."

"Peter, oh, Peter, we want you very bad!" groaned the voices in the grave-yard.

Pete gave one yell, jumped out of the buggy, and bolted down the road as fast as he could hoof it.

Dick started up the old nag and followed at a leisurely pace.

Poor Pete ran until he was completely blown, and by that time, having gone clear beyond the burying ground, waited for Dick to come up.

"Hol' on, Marse Dick, I get in wif yo' now," he panted, as Dick arrived. "Reckon I done got away from dem ghostses dat time."

He was about to get in, when a hollow voice right behind him was heard:

"No, you don't, Pete. We're dead onto you, we are."

"Fo' massey sakes, dere dey am now!" howled Pete, as he made a break.

"We'll catch you yet, Pete, just see if we don't!"

Down the road flew that frightened coon, seven feet at a stride, his long legs covering the ground at a dizzy rate.

He was dead sure that there were eight or ten hobgoblins right at his heels, and that his only safety lay in running.

"Bet fo' dollahs dey got in de waggin and cotched up wif me dat a' way," he gasped, "but dey don' get me dis time, yo' bet."

Dick followed and soon caught up with him, Pete being pretty well played out.

"Hold on, Pete, I'll take you in with me."

"No yo' don', Marse Dick. Reckon yo' got one o' dem spookses in de buggy, an' dey cotch me fo' suah."

"Nonsense. Get in."

"No, sah. I kin beat dem spooks a runnin', but ef I set in de waggin dey get me sartin'."

"Nonsense."

"No it amn't," and Pete trudged on, keeping his ears peeled for suspicious noises.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo-oo-ooo!"

A distant rooster was heard giving his cheery call.

"I'm dat's a' right," sighed Pete. "I get in wif yo' now, Marse Dick. Dem spooks doesn' daster come roun' aftah de roostah crowed. Dey ain' got no business loafin' roun' on de earf aftah dat, I tol' yo', no sah."

"Oh, is that so?" remarked Dick, who considered that he had scared Pete enough and so allowed him to get into the buggy.

"Yas'r, Marse Dick, dat am de trufe," said Pete, and he drove home, thoroughly convinced that he had been chased by ghosts and that only the crowing of the cock had saved him from being carried off to the cool and mossy graveyard and to this day he believes it.

PART XVI.

AFTER that ghost scare that Dick had given Pete, our young ventriloquist let the coon alone for a time, although he intended to have fun with him later on.

The next fellow to catch it was Jonas, the hired man, the Parson being barred out for the time.

Jonas was going past the house one morning, Mrs. Richardson being at the sitting-room window sewing, when he heard the lady say, or thought he did:

"Jonas, oh, Jonas!"

"Yes'm," said Jonas, pausing in his drawling walk.

"What have you got in the wagon out at the gate?"

"Them little pigs, ma'am," said Jonas.

"What little pigs?"

"Why, the ones our old sow had a week or so ago, yu know."

"Fetch them in here, Jonas."

"I'm going to take 'em to the butcher's. Pa'son says they ain't no use in raisin' 'em. We got enough, he says."

Mrs. Richardson heard Jonas, the man, speaking very loud, but she had no idea he was addressing her.

"Fetch them in here, Jonas."

"In the sittin' room?" gasped the yank.

"Yes, certainly, the dear little things."

"Wall, I'll be blowed!" muttered the man as he started for the gate.

"And I say, Jonas?"

"Yes'm."

"Just turn 'em loose, the little dears. I do so love little baby pigs."

"Reckon Mis' Rich'dson's gone loony," muttered Jonas. "What she want them pigs turned loose in de sittin' room for, I wonder?"

However, obedience was one of the hired man's strong points and he asked no questions.

He went to the wagon, opened the box, which had slats nailed over it, took out three or four squealing shoats, tucked them under his arms and started for the house.

When he reached the piazza Mrs. Rich-

ardson looked up wondering what he was going to do with the pigs which she knew the Parson meant to sell.

The juvenile porkers were squealing for all they were worth and were doing their utmost to squirm themselves loose.

Jonas walked right in through the French window, which was just like a door, and dumped the pigs on the floor.

"There you are, ma'am," he said, and started to go.

"Mercy sakes, Jonas, what are you about?" screamed the Parson's wife, jumping up.

"On'y doin' what yer told me tu du," snorted Jonas, as he went out.

Meanwhile those young pigs were having lots of fun in the sitting room.

One of them upset a work basket and got himself snarled up with darning cotton, spools of thread and other odds and ends. Another got under the sewing machine and squeaked like a good fellow.

The others were racing back and forth, protesting in a loud key against being where they were and yet making no effort to get out.

They went racing past those open windows a dozen times, but because the Parson's wife tried to shoo them out they wouldn't go out.

"Jonas, Jonas, come and take these pigs out!" she screamed, but Jonas was somewhere else about that time.

Such a squealing you never heard in all your life.

Each one of those young grunTERS seemed to have a steam whistle in his mouth and be blowing on it with forty horse power.

They were everywhere at once, under foot, in this corner and that, in all places in fact where they were not wanted.

They jumped between the chair rounds they got under the rockers, they became entangled in the lace curtains, they tumbled over each other and all the time they never forgot to squeal.

"Shool get out of here!" cried Mrs. Richardson, grabbing up a feather duster and trying to drive the frisky bacon out at the windows.

Talk about pigs in clover, and trying to get the pigs in the pen!

Why, that game was easy as going to sleep in church compared with this one.

Those under-sized grunTERS had a regular circus all to themselves.

They raced and tore around and around the sitting room, and although there were three windows and a door where they might have run out they wouldn't use one of them.

Such is the perversity of pigs, the juvenile variety of the breed having more than their share.

Poor Mrs. Richardson was hot and fidgety and all broke up, and the more she tried to root the pigs out the more they would not be rooted.

"Dear me, the place will be just horrid. Whatever induced that man to bring the dirty little beasts in here? People are getting worse and worse every day around the place. I wonder if the Parson told him to do it?"

Just then the Parson came along and looked in.

"Goodness me, what does this mean?" he gasped.

Jonas was out at the gate and the Parson called to him.

"I thought I told you to take the little pigs to town," he said, when Jonas came up.

Mrs. Richardson had just skipped out, having had all she wanted.

"So yu did, Pa'son, but Mis Rich'dson told me tu turn 'em loose in the settin'-room."

"Turn the pigs loose in the sitting-room, Jonas?"

"Yas, sir, she did."

"What nonsense!"

"Gi' yu my word she did, Pa'son."

"Yes, yes, I don't dispute it, Jonas, but how foolish it was to do it."

"Yes, I reckoned thet way myself, but she telled me tu du it, so I hed tu du it, yu see."

"Get them out at once, Jonas, and put them in the wagon."

Jonas set out to obey the order, but the shoats had something to say about that.

Whereas they would not get out before,

they now, when Jonas tried to grab them, bolted out of those windows in a jiffy.

Out upon the piazza and over the lawn they scampered, and every single one of them seemed to be in half a dozen places at once.

It took the Parson and Jonas and Pete and Sadie, and finally Dick himself, a good ten minutes to corner, capture and get them back in the box in the wagon.

"Haven't had any more fun all summer," remarked Dick as Jonas drove off.

Then Mrs. Richardson went for her husband.

"I really think you are getting worse every day, my dear," she said.

The actual truth about those pigs was never known, for Mrs. Richardson would not investigate the matter and nobody else did, Jonas holding to the opinion, however, that the Parson's wife had been just a little off that day.

Nothing particular in the way of snaps happened for two or three days, although Dick was always doing something in that line, but at last the young fellow worked a dandy one which I shall have to tell you all about.

The young fellow was down at the village in the drug store, buying a few things for his mother and talking to the clerk, when in came a smart young chap who fancied himself a little better than any one else.

"Yas, you did, you said I was a donkey, don't chaw know."

"I didn't say that."

"Yas, you did. Awsk the boy if you didn't."

"I heard some one say it," remarked Dick.

"So did I," said the clerk; "but it wasn't me."

"I think you're a liar, sah."

"What's that, you think I'm a liar, do you?" cried the clerk, getting his back up.

"Pon me wawd, I never said so," protested the dude.

"Yes, you did, you jay."

Now it was the dude's turn to get mad.



"Stop acallin' me a nigger. I tol' yo', yo' big mick." It was Dick who put the finishing touch on that, too. Sadie glared at Pete, and Pete glared at Sadie, both ready to declare that the other had insulted them.

"Why do you say that?" asked the good man, in great astonishment.

"The idea of your telling Jonas to put those little pigs in the house."

"Why, I never told him!" gasped the Parson. "He says you did."

"If" and the lady now took her turn to be astonished.

"Yes, he says you told him to do it."

"How ridiculous!"

"That's what I think. I don't see what you could have been thinking of."

"But I never told him anything of the sort."

"But you know that Jonas always tells the truth," said the Parson, mildly.

"I don't know whether he does or not," snapped the lady forgetting that she had said the same a score of times.

In those cases, however, the joke was on the Parson, and this time she had it and that made a big difference.

"I don't believe he always tells it, anyhow," she sputtered, and she went off at that, having the last word, and that settled it.

It was not often that Dick put up a job on his mother, but this was one of the occasions and it was worth remembering.

"Hallo dude!" said the voice of the clerk.

"I don't want you to call me names, sah," said the dude.

"Ah, go sit on a tack."

The dude was surprised and so was the clerk.

Both saw each other and both saw Dick, and they would have sworn that the latter had not said a word.

"I didn't come in heah to be insulted, sah."

"But I haven't said a word."

"Yas, you have, you howid chump."

"What do you mean by calling me a chump?" demanded the pill pounder, making a grab for the seltzer bottle.

"Pon me wawd, I didn't do anything of the kind."

"Yes, you did, you dandy slim."

"Weally, sah, I shawn't allow you to address me like that."

"It wasn't me," protested the clerk.

"Maybe you think I haven't got eahs, sah?"

"Every donkey has, and so have you."

"What do you say, sah?" asked the dude, getting red in the face.

"I didn't say a word."

"Don't you call me a jay, sah. I won't have it."

"I didn't."

"Who did, then? The boy hawd you say it."

"I heard somebody say it," said that innocent Dick.

"Of cawse he did, and it was you, sah."

"No, really it wasn't."

"Go bag yaw head, you old liah."

"Look here, don't you call me a liar, you silly dude."

"Who's a silly dude, sah?"

"You are, and you needn't call me a liar."

"Weally, I wouldn't be so wude. I nevah did."

"Yes, you did; didn't he, Dick?"

"Somebody did, certainly," was the answer of that innocent youth.

"Yah, rats! You're both chumps."

"Who said that?" cried the drug juggler, looking around.

"Wouldn't you like to know?"

The voice came from the other end of the counter.

"It's some fellah ovah theah by the miwaw," said the dude.

"Shut up, dude, and mind your own business."

"Theah, I knew theah was a fellah theah."

"Go tighten your corsets or you'll fall apart."

"The horrid fellah," gasped the dude, blushing.

"That's one on you," laughed the clerk.

"How much did you knock down to-day, old plaster scraper?" called the voice.

This time it was the clerk's turn to get red.

"Who is that fellow, Dick?" he asked, turning to our hero.

"Ah, go on, you know me, you owe my old woman for board. Six weeks."

The clerk was not very rapid in paying his bills, but he did not owe as much as that.

"Oh, it's you, Tom Thatcher, is it?" he growled. "I'll fix you!"

"No, it ain't Tom Thatcher, you leather head."

"Who is it, Dick?" asked the angry clerk while the dude laughed.

"I don't know," said Dick. "I don't know that voice."

"If you tell on me I'll punch your head!" cried the voice. "Ah, there, dude, how long has your watch been in soak?"

"You howid fellah!" growled the dude.

"I nevah put anything in soak."

"Go put your head in then, it needs it very bad. Hallo, Pills, how many cigars did you sneak to-day?"

"I'll break your jaw!" cried the clerk, making a break for the other side of the store.

There was a shuffling of feet as if a fellow were running, a click of a lock, and then a laugh.

"Ha! collar buttons! You didn't catch me, did you?"

"Where has he gone?" asked the clerk, looking behind the standing mirror at the further end of the store.

"Look in the dude's head, it's empty, you know."

"The saucy fellah!" snorted the dude.

"If I catch him I'll stwike him weal hawd."

"You struck me for ten cents last night, dude."

"Wheah is the fellah?" asked that mad dude, walking along the counter and looking over it. "Wheah can he hide?"

"I don't know," muttered the puzzled clerk. "Did you see him go out from behind the mirror, Dick?"

"Nixey, Jim," said Dick.

Neither the dude nor the soda water mixer once suspected Dick of putting up any job.

They were looking at him all the time and never saw him open his head except to answer a question.

They had both heard of ventriloquists, to be sure, but they didn't know how the fellows worked and they never suspected that Dick was one.

Why, he had no mustaches and no puppets and so how could he do the tricks they had heard about?

"Yah! You couldn't see an elephant if he stepped on you," said that chaffing voice, right behind the clerk.

He turned suddenly, and there was a click of a door being shut in a hurry.

There was a cupboard used for hanging up coats and things right in front.

"Ha, I've got him now," cried the clerk.

"Git one of those canes," to the dude, "and belt him when he comes out."

"Ah, I say, you won't hurt me, will you?" asked the voice in the cup-board.

"Won't I, though?" snickered the clerk.

"Oh, no!"

"What's that you say?"

"No, but you've got to come out."

"If you touch me I'll tell the boss."

"About what?"

"Hooking cigars out of the case when he's at his grub."

"Aw, he knows you, deah boy," chuckled the dude.

"I'll smash your jaw for that!" growled the clerk.

"If you do I'll tell how much you knocked down on the money drawer to-day."

Things were getting interesting for the compounder of gargles.

Just then, however, the boss came back from lunch.

The clerk finished serving Dick, gave the

dude what he wanted, and then went to wait on two giggling girls at the soda fountain at the other end of the shop.

The first chance he got he opened that closet door.

There was no one in it, and he felt that he was out of sight himself.

It was along about this time that Dick roasted that slim nig, Pete, once more, and incidentally got in one on Sadie, the hired girl.

It was washing day and Pete had to draw water from a hogshead to supply Sadie with the material for gargling the soiled clothes of the household.

He had filled a couple of tubs and thought that ought to be enough when he heard the girl say:

"Fetch some more water, Pete, and hurry up."

"Goodness gracious me, wha' de mattah wif dat gal?" grunted Pete, picking up the bucket again.

He had no sooner emptied it into the tub than Sadie sang out:

"Hurry up, you loafer, and fill up the tub."

"My goodness, 'pears to me 'yo' am in a hurry," Pete remarked as he sloped.

Sadie was rubbing a wet sheet on the washboard and did not hear him.

Master Dick was in a convenient spot and neither Pete nor Sadie saw him.

Pete filled the third tub and he heard Sadie say:

"I want two more, you big loon."

Pete dropped his pail in great disgust.

"Ain' 'yo' got watah 'nuff now, I like to know?"

"What's that?" asked Sadie, pausing in her manipulation of the sheet.

"I said didn' 'yo' hab watah 'nuff?"

"Certainly. You didn't need to get that other tub."

"Den wha' fo' 'yo' tol' me to get it, I like to know?"

"I didn't."

"Yes, 'yo' did."

"I did not, you nigger."

"Yo' did so, 'yo' Irish Turk."

Then both of them looked at each other, Sadie with her arms in the tub and Pete with surprise on his mug.

"Don' see wha' call 'yo' are got to call me a niggah, anyhow," muttered Pete.

"The same you have to call me an Irish Turk," retorted Sadie. "I'm not Irish, and I'm not a Turk."

"Yas, 'yo' is, 'yo' big flannel mouf."

"What's that you say?"

"Didn' say nuffin'."

"Yes, you did, nigger."

"I don' wan' 'yo' to call me a nigger, I tol' 'yo'."

"Who did?"

"Yo' did, 'yo' Irish loafah."

Sadie had stood all of that sort of talk that she was going to.

"I ain't Irish, I tell you. I'm as good American as ever lived, you big moke."

Dick added on the last of the speech.

"Stop acallin' me a nigger, I tol' 'yo', 'yo' big Mick."

It was Dick who put the finishing touch on that, too.

Sadie glared at Pete, and Pete glared at Sadie, both ready to declare that the other had insulted them.

Sadie was a Yank and hated Irish girls, and Pete knew that he was a coon and did not want to be told so all the time.

"Stop o' dat," he said wrathfully.

"I hain't done nothing and you keep calling me Irish."

"Ain' neider, 'yo' big liar!"

That settled it.

PART XVII.

SADIE might allow herself to be called Irish, but she drew the line at that.

When you called her a liar, that was the time for war.

She thought Pete had done so, but it was only that mischievous Dick with his ventriloquism.

Sadie didn't know anything about that, though, and she would have sworn that Pete had told her she was a liar.

That was enough and a good deal to spare.

She yanked that wet sheet out of the tub, doubled it up, gave it a twist, and went for that coon hot footed.

Swish!

Swash!

Splash!

Biff!

Every one of the above means that Pete got a crack over the head with the wet sheet.

It was a dandy club, and Sadie knew well how to use it.

She belted the coon over the head, in the neck, on the back, and wherever she could get in a crack.

That sheet stood a good chance of being beatendry before Sadie got through with it.

Every time Pete got a crack with it, the water splattered in all directions, and the walls were regularly frescoed with it.

That girl Sadie had plenty of muscle, and she had a good grip on the sheet, too, and every time she hit Pete he was well aware of it.

She did not keep quiet all this time, either, you can bet.

"Call me an Irish Turk, will you, you sassy nigger?"

Whack!

Spat!

"Come right into my own kitchen, and insult me, hey?"

Swish!

Swash!

"Well, I guess not, you black loafer, not as long as I've got anything to say."

Biff!

Slap!

"Take that, you black villain, and learn to behave yourself."

Pete was having a matinee of it and no mistake, and the performance was for his benefit entirely.

Sadie banged away at him, not until she was tired, for she could have kept it up an hour longer, but until Pete made a sudden break, fell into the wash tub, overturned it and flooded the kitchen.

That hired girl gave a yell and dusted out of that, holding up her skirts, and Pete had skipped by the time she returned.

"Don' see wha' de mattah wif dat gal," muttered the coon, making his escape.

"Neber call her 'Ish once, an' she call me niggah plenty times. Let her get watah fo' shese'f now if she wan' it, I won' do it."

"Confound that nigger," muttered Sadie, when she returned. "Just look at that kitchen. Who's going to mop up all that water, I'd like to know? Here you, Pete, come back here!"

Pete knew when he had a good thing, however, and he did not go back.

Sadie had to do the mop act herself, and when Jonas came along half an hour afterwards, he had to fetch water, much to his disgust.

Dick had skipped before this, or there might have been more fun in that kitchen, but as he was not a bird, and could not be in two places at once, the racket was held somewhere else.

Just at that time Dick was down in the village hanging around the store looking for snaps.

In came Squire Muddle and walked up to the counter, Dick being seated on a barrel a few feet away.

"Gimme a gallon o' rum, Mr. Jones, and hurry up with it."

The clerk was a bit surprised, not at the size of the order, but the nature of it, for the Squire was a rank temperance crank, and everybody knew it!

"We don't keep it, Squire," said the clerk.

"Got any hard cider, then? That'll do."

"Yes, Squire, we've got some o' that. We're keeping it for vinegar."

"Vinegar be blowed! I want to get good and tight!"

All hands looked at the Squire, for such a thing was never heard of in town.

"What you all looking at me so for?" he snapped. "Mr. Jones, I want two pounds o' dried apples."

"Yes, Squire."

"So's they'll soak the rum better," the Squire seemed to add.

"But we don't keep rum, Squire."

"Who said you did?" snapped the other.

"I should hope you didn't keep it, indeed."

"Yes, Squire; anything else?"

"Gimme 'bout forty cigars."

The Squire was a crank on the subject of

tobacco as well as rum, and this order seemed singular on that account.

"Cigars, Squire? Did you say cigars?"

"No, I didn't, the nasty things. What do you take me for?"

"An old woman, of course."

"What's that, Mr. Jones? What do you say?" snarled Muddle.

"I didn't say anything, sir."

"Yes, you did. You called me an old woman."

"You're a liar. I didn't!"

"How dare you call me a liar?" stormed Muddle, whacking the counter with his stick.

"Why, I never did."

"Get out, you pudding head!"

"Oh!" shrieked the female crank.

"What, say, Mrs. Hidgins?" asked the Squire, seeing the old gal's jaws going.

"Aren't you ashamed to speak to me, Squire Muddle, after—"

"Order drinks all around, I'll pay for 'em."

The Parson happened into the store just as the Squire's voice said this.

"Why, Squire, you amaze me," said the worthy man. "I did not know that you ever drank."

"Me? Drink! Well, I guess not," sputtered Muddle. "I wouldn't have any of the stuff, sold or made, or used in any way, shape, manner, form, style, description, class, sort or kind, I wouldn't, and I'd pros-

to fine and imprison everybody that ever did; yes sir, and put down the cussed traffic which is—"

"Was there anything else besides dried apples, squire?" asked the clerk, who was afraid the old duffer would get wound up.

It took a few minutes for Muddle to get back to his groceries, and nobody started him on the subject of temperance again, fearing he would never stop if they did.

After a time he went out, got into his buggy, and drove away, when the following remarks were made:

"He did tell me to put him up some rum or hard cider, and forty cigars."

"I know he said he hadn't been on a tear in three days; for I heard him."



She yanked that wet sheet out of the tub, doubled it up, gave it a twist, and went for that coon hot footed. Swish! Swash! Splash! Biff! Every one of the above means that Pete got a crack over the head with the wet sheet.

"Really, now, Squire, I can't see—"

"Oh, shut up, you beer guzzler."

The Squire was still pounding on the counter and being deaf besides, did not hear these choice remarks.

"What do you wish, Squire?" asked the boss, coming up.

"Go soak your head, you old duffer."

"Really, Squire Muddle, I can't have you using—"

"What say, Brown?" asked Muddle.

"That clerk of yours called me a liar."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Brown, I wouldn't do such a thing, I—"

"Shut up and give me that rum. I haven't been on a tear for three days."

The boss and the clerk were very much astonished at this last declaration of Squire Muddle's.

An old woman standing near was a leading light of the female temperance cranks in town and she was greatly horrified.

"Why, Squire!" she gasped, "do you mean to say that you take the serpent into your bosom, that you put the destroyer into your mouth, that you so far forget yourself, your family, your friends, your—"

"Cork up, you old hen, you talk too much."

ecute anybody that made it, and drive the cussed thing out o' town."

The Squire would have gone on and delivered a temperance lecture there and then, forgetting all about everything else, but the parson fetched him up with:

"But you just told Mr. Brown to bring on drinks for the crowd, and that you would pay for them."

"I?" gasped Muddle. "I never."

"You certainly did, squire," put in the storekeeper.

"And you told me to do you up some rum, hard cider and cigars," added the clerk.

"And you said you hadn't been on a tear for three days," chimed in the temperance woman.

Dick had vamoosed that ranche or there might have been more fun yet.

The young fellow did not care to carry on while the Parson was around, however, and so he had skipped out.

The squire was the most astonished man you ever saw.

"Who says I says I hadn't been on a tear for three days?" he sputtered. "It's a libel, sir, a libel, I never said nothin' of the kind, I never was on a tear and I'd like

"He did say he wanted some rum. I guess I know."

"I certainly heard him, order up the drinks. I could not be mistaken."

It is hard matter to convince a man against what he hears, and Squire Muddle had a tough name of it that afternoon.

One or two of the very knowing ones, who were aware of Dick's little gift of stomach speaking, smiled when they heard the story, but, all the same, they gave nothing away.

"That boy is a corker," said Hollingshead, the boss builder of the place, "and he gets any amount of fun out of life without anybody knowing how."

A few days later Dick had another chance to work off a good snap on Pete, and this is about the way he did it.

That coon was out on the lawn cutting the grass when Dick espied him, but said nothing.

There was a bench behind a tree, and Dick ensconced himself in it without further delay.

Pete went by, rushing the lawn mower, and humming softly to himself.

"Peter!"

That was the Parson's voice, and looking

toward the house, Peter could see the good man sitting on the piazza in a big easy chair.

"Yas'r, heah I is, sah," said Peter. "Wha' yo' wan' wif me, sah?"

"Come here and find out, you big gilly."

"A right, sah, I'se comin', sah," said Pete, dropping the handle of the mower.

He had taken not more than three or four steps, when he was brought up short with:

"Fetch that machine along, you stupid donkey. Haven't you any sense?"

"Yo' wan' de lawn mowah ober dere, does yo', boss?"

"Certainly. Run it up and down the piazza a few times."

"Dey ain' no grass ter cut on de pizarrer, boss," grunted Pete.

"No back talk, you black dunce. Do as I tell you."

"De boss hab gotter use bettah language to me if I'se gwine ter stay yer reg'lar," growled Pete. "I won't stan' it f'om him, if he am de Pa'son."

"Hurry up with that lawn mower and don't have so much to say."

"Yas'r!" and Pete grabbed the mower and pushed it across the lawn till he reached the walk.

It's all right when you put one of those contrivances on the grass and run it, for then the noise is deadened and you don't mind it.

It isn't so very bad, either, on a gravel walk, although there is some rattling then.

For a first-class racket, however, run a lawn mower over a piazza floor and you will get it.

Now the Parson was fast asleep in his chair, as you may have imagined, when Pete came up.

The coon supposed him to be awake and thinking over a sermon or something of that sort.

"Dat am a funny notion de ol' man get," he thought. "Reckon de noise on'y boder him, but den he orter know what he want an' wha' he don' want."

Pete lifted the mower up, set it on the piazza floor, and began wheeling it up and down.

For a minute or so the Parson didn't get on to it, but kept right on snoozing.

"Make her go faster, Pete."

"A right, boss," and Pete put on the steam.

"Faster yet, run, you black idiot," remarked the Parson.

Pete began to run up and down the verandah, pushing that clattering lawn mower in front of him.

The racket was something awful, of course.

The Parson's sweet dreams were suddenly most rudely awakened.

He jumped up so quick that he banged his head against the side of the house and saw several constellations.

Pete dashed by at full tilt, reached the other end, turned and started to make the return trip.

"Goodness me, what are you doing?" cried the Parson. "Stop that, Peter. Haven't you any sense?"

Pete was making too much noise himself to hear anything else and he did not stop until the Parson grabbed hold of him and yelled:

"Here, here, what are you doing? I can't have all this noise."

"Ain' on'y doin' wha' yo' tol' me ter, boss," said Pete.

"Doing what I told you to?"

"Ahem! Yo' done tol' me ter drag de masheen ober de pizarrer an' I done it."

"Why! I never told you to do anything of the kind."

"Oh, Pa'son! how could yo' say a wo'd like o' dat?" said Pete, when I heard yo' so plain like anything."

"Then I must have talked in my sleep," grunted the Parson, finding no other explanation.

"Dat am nuffin' to me, sah," returned Pete. "I heah yo' tol' me ter draw de mowah up an' down de pizarrer an' dat all I gotter tink about."

"Take it away and cut the grass," sputtered the Parson. "I never told you anything so ridiculous."

Pete obeyed orders, of course, but he growled as he went off.

"Do wish de Pa'son would fin' out wha'

he wan's to do an' not go ter makin' a pusson do fus' disting an' den dat, like he don' know wha' he do want."

The cranky coon did not have any more trouble, however, for the Parson, having had his nap broken up, went back to his study and got to writing, leaving Pete to finish mowing the lawn, Dick having already gone off to interview some one else.

When Dick got around to the barn he found Jonas turning a grind stone with his foot and putting an edge on a jack knife, having no other work to do just then.

"Come on dere, yo' lazy fellah, wha' yo' doin' loafin' roun' yer?"

Jonas looked up, expecting to see Pete, but saw only Dick.

"Yo' get to wo'k, I tol' yo', else I go tol' de boss on youse."

"Reckon thet nigger's got tew much ter say 'baout my workin' or not," muttered Jonas. "What business is it o' his'n, anyhow?"

"Don't ask me," replied Dick. "I don't pretend to control that coon."

"Wall, he's got a sight o' gall if he thinks he's goin' ter run me," snorted the countryman.

"Hi, dere, yo' Jonas, go fotch a pail o' watah fo' Sarah, she wan's it."

"Just hear that nigger orderin' me raound jest 's if I hadn't nuthin' tu du but run arrands fur him," snapped Jonas.

"Well, I wouldn't go for him if I were you, Jonas."

"Course I won't. He ain't my boss."

"Hurry up dere, yo' lazy fellah, an' get dat bucket o' watah."

"Go get it yourself," snapped Jonas.

"Hurry up, I tol' yo', yo' good fo' nuffin' hayseedah. Yo' name Rube, dat what it am, an' yo' am no good."

Jonas did not fancy being told that he was a hayseeder, and for Pete to do it was extra provoking.

He stopped the grindstone and looked all around for Pete.

"Where is that nigger, anyhow?" he asked, after looking in several directions for the coon.

Pete was still grinding away at the lawn and had no notion that trouble was getting ready for him.

Dick looked around, and presently saw that coon approach within sight of the barn.

"Go on dere, yo' lazy good fo' nuffin' tramp, an' get dat pail o' watah. Yo' don' arn yo' salt."

Jonas looked up and saw Pete going over one edge of the lawn.

"Don't yu talk like thet tu me, yu pesky nigger. If yu du yu'll get hurt."

"Shut up, yo' ole hayseed. Yo' am no good an' neber was."

"I'll show yer if I am or not," growled Jonas, and just then the coon went out of sight again.

In the natural course of events Pete would bring the lawn mower to the barn when he got through with it.

There was not much more to be done, and the job would be finished.

Jonas went on sharpening his knife, and Dick gave him something to think about.

"I tol' de boss what a loafah yo' am when I get froo."

"Reckon yew'd better mind yure own business fust off."

"Yo' orter get fired anyhow, cause yo' am positibely no good."

"I'll show that nigger if I'm any good if I get my hands on him."

"Yah, yo' am a ole stuff an' talk froo yo' hat. Yo' m too green fo' me, yo' am."

These remarks were made from time to time and Jonas was gradually worked up into what you might call a state of mind.

Presently he heard a rattling, looked up and saw Pete rolling the lawn mower towards the barn.

"Wait till yer see me dew the nigger up," he remarked, thinking that Dick was still there.

Dick had skipped out, however, thinking that he was not needed.

Well, Pete came toward the barn, never suspecting that any danger lurked there.

Jonas had a pail of water that he had brought to set the grindstone going with and he had not used it all.

As Pete came around the corner of the barn, the Yank grabbed up the bucket and let him have the contents in the neck.

Pete was a good deal surprised and acted accordingly.

The first thing he did was to fall over the lawn mower and get himself mixed up generally with it, lawn mowers being as clumsy things to fall over as rocking chairs or wheelbarrows.

While Pete was floundering around and trying to extricate himself, Jonas got another pail of water and let him have it in the neck.

Finally Pete got up, and having seen Jonas chuck the water over him, demanded to know the reason.

"Wha' fo' yo' wan' ter frow watah ober me fo', yo' Jonas?"

"Cause yew said I was no good, that's why."

"Nebber said so."

"Yas, yew did."

"Do yer mean tu call me a liar?"

"Yas, if yo' say dat yo' am."

Then there was more trouble.

PART XVIII.

It it they went, hammer and tongs, Pete and Jonas, and there was a first class scrapping match there in half a shake.

Pete was no slouch of a fighter if he was thin and lanky and at any rate he could butt if he couldn't hit.

Jonas did not know much about the science of fighting, but he could "wrestle" and puff and knock holes out of the air to perfection.

The struggle between these two worthies was naturally of a rough and tumble order and they proceeded to wipe up the gravel walk in elegant style.

"Don't yu go to callin' me a liar, yu or'nary nigger yu," sputtered Jonas.

"Reckon I ain' goin' ter let yo' frow watah ober me fo' nuffin', yo' slob-sided Yankee yo', not if I know't."

There was a great deal of talk, plenty of hustling and tusseling, but not very much hitting.

Then that lawn mower took a part in the proceedings and knocked them both out.

They fell over it as they swayed to and fro trying to trip each other up and it accomplished what they could not.

Both went flying and the lawn mower seemed to laugh with a fiendish delight as those two chromos were spread out upon the grass.

Jonas thought that Pete had thrown him and he got up very mad intending to do up that coon in half a shake.

Pete did not propose to be done up, and when Jonas came for him he lowered his head and went at the Yank goat fashion.

Jonas got it in the pit of the stomach and was doubled up in a jiffy.

At that moment along came the Parson just in time to see the fun.

He was greatly surprised, for such a thing as a fight had not taken place around his neighborhood since the departure of Hiram and Rastus.

"What does this mean?" he cried, indignantly. "Really you astonish me. Peter, Jonas, what do you mean by fighting?"

"Wall, boss, dat fellah frow watah ober me an' hit me fus' an' I gotter do suffin'," explained the coon.

"He called me a liah, Pa'son, and said I was no good and a hayseeder, and ordered me abaout the place jest as if he owned me, and I chucked a bucket o' water on him, and he called me a liar."

"Nebber did, boss, till he say I do all dem tings, an' den I say he a liah if he say dat, an' den he wen' fo' me, an' de lawn mowah frowed us down."

"He did so, Pa'son, he ordered me araound, told me to fetch a bucket o' water, called me no good and everything else."

"Oh, boss, don' yo' listen to um. Nebber done nuffin' ob de kin', neber said nuffin' to him. I wasn' roun' dis a way 'tall, anyhow. I was cuttin' de grass, an' when I get froo I come roun' yer, an' den he frow watah ober me an' make me fall ober de lawn mowah, and den I gets mad—"

"Stop, stop! I can't allow this. What do you say Peter did, Jonas?"

The hired man told his story over again, there being no difference in the main points.

"What made you do that, Peter?" asked the Parson.

Peter denied having done anything as alleged by Jonas, and backed up his assertion with the most solemn declarations.

The Parson did not know what to think. Pete already carried the little hatchet for truthfulness, but Jonas was considered credible as well, although he did not have the unsullied word for veracity that Pete did.

"Well, well, maybe you've both made a mistake," he said, "and at any rate I can't have any fighting about the place, so make it up and don't let me hear any more of it."

The belligerents went their separate ways, but the affair was by no means settled.

had she would not have thought anything about it.

Just as she reached the bottom step and was about to go over to the vinegar barrel, she heard a whisper.

"There's the hired girl. Not bad looking, hey, Bill?"

Sadie began to feel queer, but she made no sign.

"We'll smother her to-night and get the silver, won't we?"

"Nobody twigged us going in here, did they?"

Sadie wasn't going to stay in the cellar after that, you bet.

A couple of tramps had got in somehow,

"Goin' to rob us. Come!"

Jonas went down into the cellar followed by Sadie.

"Sh! Bill, there's the hired man. He never can find us behind these barrels."

A cold sweat began to rush out upon the Yank's high forehead.

"Do you think you could manage him alone, Jack, while I tackled the gal?"

"Yes, I'll stick a knife in him as easy as nothing."

Jonas edged off toward the steps, feeling a little uneasy where he was.

"H'm, we must get 'em out o' that," he muttered. "Behind them barrels, hey?"

"Go and get Peter to help you," suggest-



Sadie's face was as red as fire, and she was as mad as they generally make 'em. "Well, I never!" she sputtered. Then she proceeded to more active measures than making explosive exclamations.

"Reckon I gib dat low white trash ez good ez he gib me," muttered Pete, "an' if he fool roun' dish yer ge'man again he get hu't, he do."

"Goldurn that pesky nigger," remarked Jonas, as he went away, "I ain't goin' ter take no sass from him, I tell yer, and I'll get hunk on him fur this here business, yu see if I don't. On'y fur the Parson's comin' long, I'd swatted him in the jaw."

Dick could easily have kept up the fuss between the two freaks if he desired, but he knew that the Parson would give them both the bounce if there was any more trouble and so he left them alone.

He liked fun as much as any one, that young fellow did, but he wasn't mean, and he would never do a thing to get a fellow in trouble.

Both Pete and Jonas growled a bit, but as time went on they forgot their differences and were as good friends as ever.

During the afternoon Sadie had occasion to go down cellar for something, a cup of vinegar or some molasses or something else, and Dick sat just outside the open door whittling.

Sadie went down from the kitchen, the outside door being left open for light and air, and she did not see Dick, and if she

and meant to rob the house that night, and it was lucky she had discovered them.

Out of that cellar she flew in a jiffy, and nearly fell over Dick, just outside.

"Oh, Master Dick," she whispered, "there's two men hid away in the cellar, and they're going to rob and murder us all to-night."

"Well, go tell 'em they mustn't," said Dick, quietly. "It won't be convenient to-night."

"Lor! how can you talk so?" gasped that rattled maid of all work. "Somebody's got to go for the constable. Oh, there's Jonas."

The slab-sided Yank came along with a hoe over his shoulder at that moment, and Sadie said:

"Oh, Jonas, what do you think? Somebody's got in the cellar, and—"

"Wall, if the cider's missin', it ain't me what's took it," said Jonas, eager to defend himself. "I hain't dranked any for tew weeks."

"There's two men in the cellar," said Sadie, in a hoarse whisper, seizing Jonas by the arm.

"Dew tell!"

"Yes."

"What be they dewin'?"

ed Sadie. "Have you got a gun or a pistol?"

"I think I could take that fellow's eye out from here if I wasn't afraid of making too much noise, Bill."

"Yes, and so could I."

Jonas and Sadie dusted out of that cellar mighty sudden.

"Hallo, what's up?" asked Dick, as they came flying out.

"They's two tramps down there, and they're going to rob and murder all hands to-night."

"Can't you get 'em out?"

"They're hid behind the barrels."

"Well, hunt 'em out. What good are you, anyhow?"

The coon now made his appearance, and Jonas said:

"Say, Pete, come down cellar a minute. There's something there we want ter fetch up."

"A' right, sah," said Pete. "I help yo' right away."

Just as they reached the cellar they heard a hoarse whisper:

"Say, Bill, I reckon they are onto us now."

"Yes, and we'd better change our hiding-place."

"H'm! Who dat?" asked Pete.
 "Sh! It's two tramps."
 "Wha' dey want?"
 "They expect to go through the house to-night."
 "Ha! I jus' like to cotch 'em."
 Just then there came another whispered conference behind the barrels.
 "Are you all right now, Bill?"
 "Yes, I'm under the cider barrel."
 "Dat am a funny place," said Pete.
 "Wha' yo' gwine ter do?"
 "Grocer!" called a shrill voice at the kitchen door.
 "There's Jones," cried Sadie. "We'll get him down here to help us."
 Jonas hurried up and presently came back with the grocer's clerk.
 "Say, Bill, they're onto us. You'd better sneak."
 "Oh, I'm all right. Where are you?"
 "Behind these boxes. They'll never find me here."

The thief hunters withdrew to the cellar steps and held a council of war.
 "They don't know we can hear 'em whisperin'," said Jonas, "and we must be careful. We gotter get 'em out o' thet."
 "Haul down the boxes and things and fetch 'em out," said Jones.
 "They've got guns!" cried Sadie, "and they'll shoot."
 "Ain' afeared o' dat," sniffed Pete. "We mus' get 'em out befo' dey kin shoot."
 A neighbor's hired man happened along just then and was impressed into service. The four men, Sadie and Dick then went down the cellar again and the work of dislodging the tramps was begun.
 Dick did not do any more work than was absolutely necessary, you may be sure.
 He suggested pulling down this and that, and pulling away the other thing, laying out work for the rest but doing none himself.
 "Say, Bill, they're coming our way. We'll have to shift ourselves."
 "Yes, crawl behind that pile of pork barrels."

There was the accumulation of years down in that cellar and some of the stuff there had not been moved in the memory of the blindest inhabitants.
 The Parson had often threatened to have the place cleaned out, but he had not done so up to date.
 "We'll get at them in a jiffy," said Dick.
 "Now then, let's have 'em out of this."
 Boxes, barrels, tubs, firkins and buckets were moved, all sorts of rubbish was tumbled over and still there was no trace of the tramps.
 They would be heard whispering together from time to time but could never be located.

The Parson joined in the search and so did Squire Muddle and Brother Sam Avery, who had called upon business connected with the church.
 Dick had that whole gang hunting over the cellar till all hands were covered with dust, cobwebs, perspiration, green mould and whitewash.
 Finally all the stuff except a big hogshead over in one corner had been shifted and still the robbers eluded discovery.
 Jonas and Pete had axes, Jones carried a crowbar, the Parson and Muddles had lighted candles, Sadie had a broom, the neighbor's hired man lugged a spade, and Dick had nothing except his cheek, which was better than all.

There was only the big hogshead over in an angle of the wall left undisturbed, and it did not seem possible that the thieves could get behind that.

The whole gang stood around it, expectancy upon their faces, Dick in the rear in a safe place, and no one daring to breathe.
 Then came some more whispers on the part of the hunted robbers.
 "It's lucky we got in this hogshead, ain't it?"
 "Yes, they'll never think of looking for us here, Bill."
 Aha, at last, the thieves were caught!
 "Dey am in de tub," whispered Pete.
 "Now we cotch 'em shuah."
 "Yas, b'gosh, we'll bust open the ba'l and have 'em eout," said Jonas.
 Without further parley, and as though by preconcerted arrangement, Pete and

Jonas raised their axes and struck the side of the cask a dandy old crack.

As though by a mutual understanding they both struck alongside the bung, one on the right side the other on the left.

At the second blow there was a pop, a wooden plug flew out and took Muddles in the ear, while a stream of water squirted over the rest of the gang.

That hogshead was no more or less than a water butt for waste rain water, and in time of drought came in handy.

A pump connecting with it was in the kitchen, but all hands seemed to have forgotten this fact.

The water came rushing out and all hands got a ducking and beat a retreat.

Our Dick was all right, of course, for it was not the sort of day when he was being left, and he and good luck were still on speaking terms.

Away dusted the crowd and the two tramps were forgotten.

Finally, when the water ceased coming out with such a rush, Jonas and Peter put back the bung and drove it in tight.

"Don' b'leve dem fellers was dere 'tall," sputtered Pete. "Whoever heerd ob tramps gettin inter watah like o' dat?"

The cellar had a good cleaning out for once, at any rate.

The tramps were not found nor was the house robbed.

Nobody seemed to know just what became of the robbers, but the Parson, in thinking the matter over afterwards, said to his wife:

"It seems rather singular that we did not find them. Was Richard down there?"

"You don't suppose he let the men out, do you, Parson?" retorted Mrs. Richardson. "The idea of blaming that innocent boy."

"It merely occurred to me that perhaps the whole thing was a hoax, and that possibly Richard might explain—"

"The idea! You blame that poor innocent boy for everything!" interrupted Dick's mother, and the Parson had to give up his half formed theory and change the subject.

The merest reference to the possible instrumentality of Dick's in the bringing about of the affair, no matter how slight, was enough to put the lady on her high horse at once and the Parson was glad enough to talk about something else.

That little snap of Dick's had one good result, at all events, for the cellar got a cleaning which it might not have had in years.

Things that had been long lost were brought to light also, and our young scamp was a public benefactor in that way.

You don't want to give the young rascal too much credit, however, for he only went into the snap for the fun of it, and it grew upon him as it progressed.

There was a slight scare in regard to the robbers, but not much of one after all, such a thing as a burglary being something unheard of in town, and so you could not even get up a scare on the subject of the possible happening of such an event.

One morning a few days later the Parson was late to breakfast, having been called up in the middle of the night to marry a couple who lived away off in the backwoods and could not get in earlier.

The good man being broken of his rest, slept later than usual and had his breakfast by himself, the others having finished.

Sadie came in to see if he wanted anything when he was pegging away at his grub, but he paid no attention to her.

Dick was just outside the window, and here was a snap all ready for him.

"Come here, my little darling, and kiss your ducky daddles."

Sadie was considerably surprised, not to say shocked, at hearing such language from the parson.

Some girls would have liked it, but she did not.

She had a fellow, and he was young and good-looking, while the Parson was old and married.

He did not pay any attention to the Parson but began dusting around the room.

"Come here. I say, my old sweetheart, and let me kiss you."

"Well, I never did!" gasped Sadie. "What'll your wife say?"

"Ah, go on, don't be so kittenish. Come kiss your ducky."

"Ain't you 'shamed of yourself, Mr. Richardson?" cried Sadie, giving the table a thump, and glaring savagely at the Parson.

The latter glanced up as he was about to raise a cup of coffee to his mouth.

"The idea of your talking like that!" resumed Sadie.

The Parson did not know what all the indignation was about.

"What did you say, Sadie? What's the matter?" he asked.

"The idea of a man of your age, and married, too, talking like that!"

"Like what?" gasped the Parson, at his wits' end to explain the sour looks of the girl.

"Oh, you know very well what you said," sputtered Sadie. "I've a good mind to tell your wife, and I would, too, if it wasn't for making trouble. The idea of saying such things!"

The Parson was decidedly rattled.

He couldn't make out head or tail of the fuss.

"Say what things? I did not say anything except 'Come and kiss me, you little darling.'"

Dick put the finishing touch on that speech.

"Oh, you didn't, eh?" stormed Sadie.

"Well, that's quite enough, I should say."

"Don't get too gay, old sweetness. Come and give your baby a kiss."

Sadie's face was as red as fire, and she was as mad as they generally make 'em.

"Well, I never!" she sputtered.

Then she proceeded to more active measures than making explosive exclamations.

PART XIX.

SADIE, the hired girl at the Richardson's, wasn't going to stand any nonsense.

Three or four times the Parson had asked her to kiss him, or she thought he had, and her mad was away up.

"I'll kiss you—over the left!" she snorted, as she suddenly grabbed hold of the corner of the table cloth.

She gave it one good yank, and away it came, dishes, coffee pot, tray, knives and forks and all.

The table was stripped bare in half a shake, and the Parson suddenly found his breakfast departed.

He started back, upset his chair, nearly fell over it himself, and gasped out in astonishment:

"Why, Sarah, what on earth is the matter?"

"I'll show you what's the matter," snapped that mad girl. "The idea of it, a married old man like you asking a respectable girl to kiss him, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, and I won't stay in the house another minute, and I'll tell your wife, and I'll tell my young man, and I'll scratch your face if you come near me, oh, dear, oh, dear, wow-wow, oo-oo-oo!"

Sadie had rattled on till she had worked herself into a fit of hysterics, upsetting the chairs, kicking the dishes about, and finally exploding into one grand weep.

Down on the floor she planked herself, and began to yell and blubber like a big calf.

This isn't a pathetic story, and so I don't have to work up the agony in the society novel style.

The Parson didn't for the life of him know what was up.

He had never suspected the hired girl of taking a drop too much, and didn't now, in fact.

Neither could he accuse her of an overweening passion for novels, "Aunt Mary's Beau," "Lord Slovel's Old Slippers," "Will She Skake Him?" and the rest, by which her nerves had been unstrung and her digestion impaired.

The only thing he could think of was that the slavey had always been a little touched in the head, and that good living had brought on insanity.

"Dear me, I never suspected anything of the sort," he gasped, as this conclusion came over him. "I hope she won't be dangerous."

Sadie yelled the louder the longer she was at it, and, just as the Parson conclud-

ed to beat a retreat, in came his wife, attracted by the fracas.

"What in the world is the matter?" she asked.

Dick skipped out, for the snap could take care of itself now.

"Sh! I'm afraid we'll have to send her to the hospital," whispered the Parson. "She's insane, beyond a doubt."

Sadie heard this, and jumped to her feet in a jiffy.

"I ain't crazy, neither, Mis' Rich'dson," she sputtered, "but that white-headed old villain ought to be ashamed of himself, and he'd like to make me crazy if he could, but I won't stay another minute in the place, and if you don't want to give me my

"For heaven's sake, Sadie, will you stick to the point?" interposed the Parson's wife. "Are you crazy or what? Now sit down and tell me just what is the matter."

"The Parson asked me to kiss him and said I was his little darling and his baby and if that ain't enough to make a respectable girl mad what's engaged herself and to an honest, hard-working man, what—"

"There, there, that will do, that will do. The Parson asked you to kiss him?"

"Yes'm, and if that ain't enough to rile you up I'd like to—"

"And called you his darling?"

"Yes, he did, and wanted me to kiss him and I got so mad I could have chucked

It was barely possible that the Parson might have said the words imparted to him in a fit of absent-mindedness, although he was somewhat old for that sort of business.

Mrs. Richardson quieted the excited Sarah and then went to the Parson and asked for an explanation.

"I never said anything to her," he remarked "but she got excited and finally pulled everything off the table. It does beat all how everybody acts around this house. I shall go insane myself if they don't stop."

"And you did not ask her to kiss you and call her your darling?"

"What nonsense!" and the good man had to laugh. "That's the best yet. Why,



"I'll kiss you—over the left!" she snorted, as she suddenly grabbed hold of the corner of the table cloth. She gave it one good yank, and away it came, dishes, coffee pot, tray, knives and forks and all.

month's wages, you needn't, and I don't care, it's just like him to keep me out of 'em and I'll let everybody know all about it and I hope you can't get another girl in my—"

"For goodness sake, Sarah, what are you talking about?" interrupted Mrs. Richardson, the Parson having retreated in order to escape the terrible racket.

"I'm talking about the Parson, mam, and the way he goes on, insulting a respectable girl what's engaged to be married to a decent feller, and him married too, and white headed, and has children of his own, and old enough to know better, but I'll be even with him, I will, for I'll tell my feller and—"

"Stop, stop. I can't make head or tail out of what you are saying. What has the Parson done?"

"Asked me to kiss him, and called me his little darling, the white headed old snoozer and me engaged to be married and always knowed my place and never presumed on it and everybody can tell you the same but that's the way with you country folks, you let the Irish ride all over you, but the American girls haven't any rights at all, and—"

him out the window if he is a minister and no—"

"He asked you to kiss him?"

"Yes, he did, I told you that before, and if it ain't enough to—"

"And called you his darling?"

"Yes, he did, and you needn't keep asking me as if you didn't believe me, and I don't care if you do or not. I've had all I'm going to of his nonsense, and I won't stay another—"

"There, there, don't get excited," said the lady, quietly. "I only wanted to be sure of the matter, for the way you went on I wasn't certain whether your young man had asked you to kiss him and you were engaged to the Parson and your young man was married and had children and ought to know better, or the Parson or what. In fact I don't believe you know yourself."

The fact of the matter was Mrs. Richardson was not a jealous woman, and that helped him to solve the present mystery.

She presumed that Sadie had misunderstood and had gone off her base in a hurry, without stopping to have things explained and that the more she went on the worse she got.

I would be an idiot to say such a thing. Kiss that girl? Why, her face makes me tired when I look at it. Excuse me, my dear, I did not mean to use slang, but you know what I mean."

Mrs. Richardson laughed, and nothing more was said about the matter.

Dick discovered how mad Sadie was and so he patched up the affair so as not to have a disturbance.

Sadie was at work in the kitchen, her anger still raging when she heard Jonas say:

"Yu're a blank fule that's what yu are, Sarah."

"Don't you talk to me, you ugly looking thing," snapped Sadie, without looking up.

"The idee of blamin' the Pa'son. Didn't yu know it was me?"

"Didn't I know what was you?" demanded Sadie, turning around.

She didn't see Jonas but she heard his retreating footsteps.

"What axed yu tu kiss me yu old fule, of course?"

"You did?" snapped Sadie.

"Yas I was outside the winder."

"I'll fix you for that," sputtered that mad servant gal.

She grabbed up a pail of water and rushed out.

Dick barely escaped getting a ducking, for he skipped just in time.

"Hallo, Sadie, what's eating you?" he called out at a safe distance.

"Oh, excuse me, Mr. Dick, I was going to duck that Jonas, I didn't know you was around."

"Well, you've washed the walk at all events and it needed a scrubbing," laughed Dick, as he walked away.

Jonas got a clout over the head with a wet dish towel when he finally showed up and was very much astonished.

Sadie fired him out of the kitchen when he asked for an explanation, and there was war between them for two days.

The hired girl didn't leave, and she apologized to Mrs. Richardson and explained her mistake, and after that everything was lovely and the goose was very much elevated.

You could leave Dick alone for getting out of a scrape, and having put that snap into good shape he was ready for another.

It chanced that in a day or so a traveling photographer came along that way, and desired to take a picture of the house and also the portraits of every person who lived therein, singly or in a group, he didn't care which.

He was after stamps, and it was immaterial to him in what manner he made them so long as he made enough.

He had a big wagon in which was his gallery, his living rooms, and all his establishment, so that he was always at home wherever he was.

Hitching his team on the side of the road opposite the house, he came over to the Parson's and opened negotiations.

"Go and talk to him, Dick," said Mrs. Richardson. "We don't want the house taken, but if you want a picture of yourself you can have it."

Pete, the coon, came nosing along just then, and seeing the big wagon, asked:

"Am dat a cirkis, Marse Dick? Yo' fader won' low dat, will he?"

"No, it ain't a circus, it's a traveling photographic establishment."

"Yas, dat's what I tort m'self," remarked Pete. "Looks like a ho'se, don't it, Marse Richard?"

"Git aout, yu gol durned nigger," said Jonas, who came up just then, "that's a picter taker, that is. Dont' yu know nothin'?"

"Can I do anything for you to-day, young man?" asked the peripatetic photographer, approaching. "Any views of the house, grounds, adjacent points, famous spots in the neighborhood, portraits of celebrated horses, cows, sheep or prize pigs, likenesses of your family, friends, relatives or neighbors, by themselves or in a group, highest satisfaction given, lowest price asked, testimonials from seventeen presidents, forty-one cabinet ministers, seventy congressmen, and the governors of nearly—"

"Who's turning the crank?" asked Dick. "Are you wound up for all day, or will you stop whenever you feel like it?"

"Say, Marse Richard, kin I hab my picter tooken?" asked Pete. "I neber had one, I didn't."

Sadie now joined the group, and Dick said to the artist:

"Suppose you take the gang, what do you say? Stand them out by the gate, or on the piazza, just as you like."

"Do you want to be included?" asked the artist, with an eye to business.

"No, not this time. Where'll you have 'em, out here in the gallery?"

"It's immaterial to me. What'll you have, imperial, cabinet, tintype, crayon finish, oil painting or porcelain, all in the very best style known to—"

"Oh, give us a rest," laughed Dick.

"Do you think I'm a millionaire? Give us a tintype group, that won't take much time, four for a half, or something like that."

"A group ought to be large, something like a dollar for one, very fine, every figure showing to advantage, make a fine ornament for a parlor, faces colored, jewelry gilded, dresses—"

"Never mind the frills," said Dick. "Give us four smaller ones, or two if you like, we can have two positions. Come on,

trot out your shooter and I'll pose the freaks."

The artist got out his camera, and Dick posed his collection of beauties under a tree where there was a good light, Sadie in the middle and Pete and Jonas right and left.

The artist got under his black tablecloth and squinted at the gang.

"Turn your head to the right, you hayseed!"

Jonas moved and the photographer waved his hand to stop him.

"Give no more of your back talk, you smoked Irishman."

"Don' yo' be so fresh, yo' fellah," muttered Pete, turning around.

"Stand still, can't you?" cried the photographer, coming out from under the cloth. "I can't get a picture if you wobble like that."

"Go on, you don't know nuthin' about picters, you don't."

The artist looked mad, and Dick whispered:

"Never mind him, he's of no account. Try 'em again."

The artist stood his group as he wanted and ducked under the cloth.

"Look pleasant now, you gillies. Oh, Sadie, ain't you a daisy?"

Everybody grinned and the artist was delighted.

"Very good, very good, only I wouldn't smile quite so much."

"You make me smile, you big cow."

"Never mind her," said Dick, in a low tone. "She's often taken that way."

"That's very good," said the artist, sticking in his plate and putting on a cap.

"As you are now, don't move, and be sure to look pleasant."

"Imagine your best fellow has come to take you to the circus."

"Ah, very good, that's it," said the artist.

"Now, then, don't move," and he took off the cap and grabbed up a rubber ball, for this was an instantaneous picture.

"Look behind you, you black moke," came the order a second later.

The artist had turned his back and given the ball a squeeze.

"Look this way, blast your ugly skin," Pete whisked around in a jiffy, and was in position when the artist saw him.

"Ah, I think we'll get something very fine," he said, taking out the plate and going into his den.

Pretty soon he came out, looking very mad.

"One of you folks moved," he said. "What sort of a picture is that?"

In the picture you could see a fine view of the back of Pete's head, while Sadie and Jonas had grins on them that would have discounted a Cheshire cat.

"Yo' don' know how ter take picters, anyhow, yo' don't!"

"Never mind what he says," put in Dick. "I'll take one of those pictures. You'd better try them again."

"Now, then, do try and keep still," muttered the artist, as he came out with a second plate.

"Yu shet up yourself and they won't be no noise."

The artist glowered at Jonas as if he would like to slug the impudent Yank, but Dick whispered:

"That's all right, he dosen't mean any harm. Don't pay any attention—"

The artist got under the cloth, humped up his back, waved his arms and tried to fix his group.

"What a lot of jays you are, anyhow! That girl's face would stop a car."

There were black looks on more faces than Pete's just then.

"Come, come, that won't do, look pleasant."

"I'll bus' yo' in de snoot, dat's wha' I do to youse."

The artist came out from under his cloth.

"I'll smash that coon in the jaw if he gives me any more lip," he growled.

"Ah, go on—don't mind him," said Dick.

"How's the focus?"

"All right."

"Then let her go."

His nibbs put in his plate and got ready.

"Now then, steady—don't move." He turned his back just for half a shake. Buzz-zz-zip!

There was a bee hovering around the nose of Jonas.

Spat!

The hired man gave it a crack, or thought he did.

Click!

The picture was taken at that very moment.

When it was brought out for inspection, all you could see of Jonas was a big hand in front of his face.

Pete and Sadie showed nearly the backs of their heads, as they had turned at the same time Jonas had raised his hand.

The artist was disgusted.

"How do you suppose I can get a good picture if you will keep moving?" he muttered.

"You don't know how to take pictures anyhow, you don't."

"No sah, yo'm no good, I do dat bettah m'self."

"I wouldn't call myself an artist, I wouldn't if I was you."

"I'll swat you all in the jaw if you talk to me, you misfit jays."

The group broke up and came toward the artist.

"Swat me in the jaw, will yo'?"

"Just you try it, once."

"Gol durn ye, don't ye gimme no sass."

The artist began to get alarmed.

"What's the matter?" he cried. "I can't get a good picture if you will move."

"It's all right," said Dick, interposing as the artist retreated.

"I'll take one of that sort if you'll finish it up," he said to the photographer, whom he followed into his den.

"Well, all right, but I'd like to get a good picture."

Dick would a good deal rather have the two he had, however, than a better one.

The snap shooter soon came out and took another squint at the group.

"Couldn't you hug the nigger, sis? It'd look immense."

"Well, I guess not," sputtered Sadie, coming forward.

"There, there, that's far enough; you'll be too big!" shouted the artist, waving his hand.

He didn't know what the trouble was, of course.

"Neber min' it, Sadie. I wouldn't let yo' hug me ef yo' wan'ed ter."

"Whar dat nigger?" asked Pete.

"Thet's rough on yu," chuckled Jonas.

"Well, I never!" stormed Sadie.

"Will you keep quiet?" screamed the artist.

Dick was having lots of fun, but he looked as innocent as a polywog in a brook.

"Stand still, folks," said he. "The man can't get a good picture if you don't."

"That's right; try and keep them quiet," said the camera fiend. "I never saw such a fidgety gang."

Then he disappeared once more and took a sight at his subjects.

"If you'd kiss the girl, Pete, it would look as fine as silk."

Then there was another outbreak.

"Well, I guess I've got something to say about that."

"He-haw, thet's a good one on yu, Sairy, durned if it ain't."

"Dear, dear, can't you keep still?" howled the artist, coming out. "What's the matter with you all?"

"You can leave me out of the group altogether!" snarled Sadie. "I wouldn't let you take me if you gimme a hundred dollars!"

"Ah, you're no good anyhow, you chew gum and squint."

Sadie made no reply to this slanderous remark, but went off, tossing her head in the air.

"Come on, we'll get a good picture of you this time," said Dick. "Don't go off mad."

Sadie was induced to come back and the artist stuck in his third plate.

"Now then, as you are, look pleasant, don't move," he said, as he fixed his people.

"This one will be good, I know."

That remained to be seen.

PART XX.

THIS time the photo artist expected to get a dandy picture of that

group of museum freaks.

He had failed a couple of times, but now everything promised well and he

smiled blandly as he prepared to press the button.

"Hallo, look here."

Somebody behind him had suddenly called him, or he thought they had and he turned.

"Turn your head on one side, Pete."

Pete obeyed, thinking the photographer had spoken.

"Look down, you, Jonas."

Jonas inclined his head till you could only see the top of it.

"Fire!"

The photographer jumped, turned around suddenly and made the exposure.

"That's all."

The group thought the artist had spoken and broke up.

"Here, here, what are you about?" he asked.

"Yo' tol' us dat was all," said Pete.

"Le's see dat picter. Reckon it am a good one."

Oh, yes, it was a dandy, and no mistake.

The top of Jonas's head and the back of Pete's was all you could see of those gillies.

The photographer was mad and refused to take any more pictures of such an uneasy crowd.

Dick took a sample of each of the pictures, and then had the man take the house and Sadie and Pete separately, the artist being satisfied.

He went on into town, where he set up his stand and got on fairly well, and Dick busied himself about other matters.

The next day, not long before dinner time, there came a tramp to the kitchen door.

He was the worst looking specimen of a bum you ever saw.

His hair was long and tangled, his beard had not seen a razor or scissors for weeks, the virgin soil lay thick upon his hands and face, and cold water was his deadly aversion.

His clothes had been purloined from misfit parlors, borrowed from solitary and unprotected scare-crows, or fished out of ash-barrels, for they were the worst imaginable.

One trouser leg was tight and of blue jeans, the other was too loose and was of a very loud check, the two being fastened together with snap-and-catch-'em clothes pins and ends of wire.

He wore a swallow-tail coat with one tail missing, a dirty yellow vest minus the buttons, and a faded flannel shirt much too small, his hat being a combination of stove-pipe and straw, and his foot-gear one boot and one low russet shoe.

A battered tomato can stuck out of his coat-tail pocket, and he chewed meditatively on a straw as he wafted himself forward.

There was no need for him to knock, as the kitchen door was open and Sadie saw him afar off.

"Get away from here!" she yelled while yet he was far from the door. "Get away, I tell you!"

Retiring modesty, timidity and girlish bashfulness had no part in that tramp's make-up, and he advanced as though he had not heard.

"Get out of here, you dirty-looking villain, or I'll set the dog on you," was Sadie's greeting as he came up to the door.

"Good-morning, missus, you're looking fine," said the unabashed and unwashed. "Got anything for a poor war veteran to-day?"

"No, I haven't, and if you don't get out I'll scald you."

As Sadie grabbed up a monster two-quart dipper and started for the stove, it was very evident she meant all she said.

She was not given to joking, Sadie was not, and tramps were her particular and pet abhorrence.

"Ah, go on, give a fellow something," said the bum. "I ain't particular about the vittles being cold, neither. I'd just as leaves take 'em hot."

"I'll give 'em to you hot enough, if you don't clear out of here, you lazy, shiftless, good-for-nothing loafer," returned Sadie, sousing the dipper into the hot water reservoir on the back of the stove.

The tramp moped, not having any especial and overweening desire to have a square

yard of his cuticle stripped off by the action of superheated aqueous fluid.

Dick was in the neighborhood, being upstairs behind the blinds, just overhead, and he heard the whole business.

The tramp sneaked around the corner of the house, and Sadie put the hot water on the table, where she could grab it up at a moment's notice.

"Sst, st. Mister Tramp, sh!"

Surely the hired girl was calling him in a hoarse whisper, and the tramp turned.

Sadie was at one of the side windows, her back turned to him.

"You hang around here till I go to the barn and I'll fix you all right."

A smile like the glitter of a diamond in a Jew pawnshop radiated the face of the bum.

"Well, she ain't so bad, after all," he gurgled under his whisky-laden breath.

"Yes, you just keep shady till I sneak, and then come in. You'll find a table full of stuff."

Well! don't you think he would accept an invitation of that size?

Rawther! as our London cousins remark.

"Well now, she ain't so bad, she ain't. Reckon she was only bluffing before 'cause the missus was 'round. Oh, I'll keep shady, you bet."

"Just sneak behind that water butt and you're all right."

"Yes'm, I know when things is high, I do, you can gamble on that."

"Sadie, oh, Sadie! Come here!"

The Parson's wife wanted something evidently.

The hired girl turned suddenly and saw the tramp still near the house.

"Come now, you clear out of this or I'll scald all the hair off your head, you dirty loafer," cried Sadie, in loud tones.

"Sadie, oh, Sadie!"

It was Mrs. Richardson again and she was in a hurry, apparently.

"Yes'm, I'm coming."

The tramp sneaked in short order and got behind the water butt.

"She had ter purtend to be mad, 'cause the missus was coming," he snickered.

"She's the right sort though, she is."

"Sadie, Sadie? Are you ever coming?"

"What's the matter now?" sputtered the girl. "What can she want o' me so near dinner time?"

Then she went to the door, but could see no one.

"Sadie!"

"Yes'm! Where are you?"

"Come down to the barn. Whitey has laid two eggs!"

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Sadie.

"Who'd ha' thought that of old Whitey. She hain't laid an egg before in a month."

She grabbed up a sun-bonnet and sneaked off to the barn in two shakes.

"Now go in there and help yourself, my good man. Eat all you want."

The tramp behind the water butt heard this invitation and availed himself of its provisions in short order.

There were provisions enough, too, and no mistake.

There was a cold boiled ham, a big apple pie, a dish of hot corn just out of the boiler, a lot of boiled potatoes, a plate of bread, a bowl full of doughnuts and a cake stuffed with raisins, currents and citron.

Sadie had scarcely turned her back when the bum sneaked into the kitchen and beheld the feast awaiting him.

"Oh, Moses! Is there so much to eat in all the world?" he gasped. "Help myself? Well, I should snicker."

He grabbed a chair and drew up to the festive board without delay.

There was no use in wasting time on knives and forks when there was so much to get away with.

He grabbed the ham in one hand and the pie in the other and began to gorge.

The pie had the first call, and he bit a regular quarter section out of it in a twinkling.

Then his grinders closed upon the ham, and fat, lean and bone gave way before his ravenous attack.

Help himself, eat all he wanted to, indeed!

You can take chances on it that he would do both.

The pie was half dispatched and a big

hole made in the ham when Sadie returned.

She had not found Mrs. Richardson, and the old white hen was sitting on a lot of door knobs, lumps of chalk and China eggs in the evident belief that she was about to hatch out a big brood of fluffy little chicks.

"Where is she?" sputtered Sadie. "The idea of calling me just when dinner is ready to go on the table!"

"Sadie!"

This time it was the Parson's wife for sure, and not that rascal Dick.

"Yes'm!" yelled Sadie, skipping out of the barn.

Mrs. Richardson was standing on the piazza calling.

"Wonder how she got there?" muttered Sadie. "It jist beats all."

"Put on an extra plate, Sadie," said the mistress. "Squire Muddle has dropped in."

"Oh!" snapped Sadie as she waltzed around to the kitchen.

As she entered she saw that tramp helping himself to pie and ham with his eye on the corn and other dainties.

She let out one terrible scream and made a dash for the broom.

"Mrs. Rich'son, Parson, Dick, Pete, Jonas, Squire, everybody, come quick!" she yelled. "There's robbers in the house."

The tramp dropped the ham, put the remains of the pie in his pocket, slipped off his chair and said reproachfully:

"Now, that's what I call sneaky, to bone on a feller arter givin' him a free invitation and tellin' him to help hisself and eat hearty. I didn't think that o' you, Sis, I really didn't."

"Get out of here, you nasty thing, get out or I'll break your head. The idea of settin' down to the table like that and helping yourself. Dick, Parson, Squire, Pete, Jonas, everybody!"

Everybody came, even Dick, and the tramp was cornered.

Sadie had given him one on the ear with the hard end of the broom, and he had dusted behind the stove, not being able to reach the door.

In came the gang, the Parson and his wife, Pete, Jonas, Squire Muddle, and lastly our Dick himself.

"My dear, what does this mean?"

"Why, Sadie, I am astonished."

"Jus' lemme get hol' ov dat fellah once."

"Be thet yure mash, Sairey?"

Dick said nothing, but he looked just too innocent for anything.

"Just see the impudence of him, Mis' Rich'son," gasped Sadie. "When you called me to come to the barn, he sneaked in and helped himself and I'd drove him away once already."

"But I didn't call you to come to the barn, Sadie."

"Yes, you did, Mis' Rich'son. You told me old Whitey had laid two eggs, and wanted me to come and see 'em."

"Jest let me get hold o' thet ugly cuss, if I don't warm him," muttered Jonas.

"They ought to arrest all tramps on sight, that's what," said the Squire.

"It's very singular," remarked the Parson.

"I ain't to blame, missus," said the tramp himself, "and I wouldn't give the young woman away, only I gotter turn State's evidence. She axed me in here herself."

"Oh, just hear him!" screamed Sadie. "Ain't you an awful liar?"

Dick added that last, but all hands thought Sadie said it.

"Ain't no liar, neither," snorted the bum.

"You told me to sneak in when you went to the barn, and help myself."

"Oh! will you just hear that?" screamed Sadie, brandishing the broom. "Ain't you 'shamed to tell such lies?"

"Hope ter die, missus, if it ain't the honest truth. She bluffed me fust off, 'cause you was around, but then she told me to wait behind the water butt, and go in and help myself when she went away."

"Oh! oh! how can you stand there and say that?" gasped Sadie.

"I'd believe the tramp before I would you, anyhow."

"Why, Parson, how can you say that?" snorted Mrs. Richardson, when she heard this remarkable declaration from her husband's lips.

"Say what, my dear? I have not said anything."

"Oh, I say, don't go back on a feller like that, boss," pleaded the tramp. "You said you'd believe me before the gal, you did for sure."

"You certainly did, Parson," grunted Squire Muddle.

"You did, for certain, Pa'son," added Jonas.

"I heerd, yo', boss, I raaly did," said Pete.

"Get out, you flatheads, I said nothing of the sort. You're all a lot of chumps."

"Way, Parson, I am surprised."

"Really, sir, I don't like such talk."

"Tain't right, Pa'son, 'taint 'tall right."

"Kiss you again!" howled Sarah. "Yes, I will, you dirty beast!"

Whack—crack—smash!

Sadie was a daisy on the broom drill, she was.

She whacked the tramp a couple of times, hit the Parson once and knocked Pete's hat off, although she only aimed at the bum.

In the confusion the tramp got away, and was glad enough to you may be sure.

Then Mrs. Richardson took Sadie to task for asking a tramp to dinner, while the Parson and Muddle went out.

"Indeed, Mis' Rich'son, I didn't ask him in, the nasty, horrid thing, and he was just lying. I'd like to scald him, and the

got a great deal more than he had bargained for.

Sadie scalded him, Pete butted him, Jonas blacked both his eyes, and then the bees got after him, and he got things hot, and thought himself in Africa instead of New England.

I don't know what he said to the first tramp when the two met again, but it is quite certain that no more of the gentry bothered that house for the rest of the summer.

Dick gave his poor pop a rest for one time after that, and the Parson took a vacation of three or four days, anyhow, so that the young fellow was forced to look



As she entered she saw that tramp helping himself to pie and ham with his eye on the corn and other dainties. She let out one terrible scream and made a dash for the broom. "Mrs. Rich'son, Parson, Dick, Pete, Jonas, Squire, everybody, come quick!" she yelled. "There's robbers in the house."

"Don't go back on a fellow like that, ole man."

"I don't know what you are all talking about," said the Parson. "Sadie, I am astonished at your inviting in that tramp. You know I don't approve of them."

"Why, Parson, I never did. I wouldn't do such a thing. You know I hate tramps like all possessed."

"Yes, you do, in your mind. I bet you kissed that fellow a dozen times."

"Why, Parson!"

All hands got at the poor man that time.

"The ideal!" snorted Sadie. "Come, now," to the tramp, "You get out of here or I'll break your head."

"Ah, come on. Give us another dozen, Sadie."

That was worse and more of it.

Everybody looked at Sadie as if they thought that she and the tramp had been having a flirtation.

"Why, Sadie, I really am astonished!"

"Didn't fink yo'd kiss a ole tramp."

"That's all I want to know of yer, Sarah."

"Never mind 'em, Sarah. Kiss me again."

idea of his asking me to kiss him. I never heard such impudence."

"It's very strange, Sadie, and I would believe you if the Parson hadn't said:

"Ah, go on, old gal. I asked him in myself."

The Parson had gone out, but his voice came wafting down the hall, and Mrs. Richardson muttered:

"Well, the ideal! I do think that man is getting worse and worse. Sadie, you can put on the dinner. Cut off the best of the ham and let Peter and Jonas have the rest of it."

"Yes'm, and now I hope you'll believe me. The idea of the Parson asking that nasty tramp into dinner!"

They all skipped out and the Parson's wife said nothing to her husband, for she knew well enough that he would only deny having said that he had invited the tramp, and that there would only be more fuss if she said anything.

That tramp met another of his own kind and told him of the great graft to be had at the Parsonage and advised him to take it in.

The second tramp went around, but he

for some other fellow to practice his science upon.

The other fellow was Pete, the slim-sided coon who was always easy to humbug.

Pete was out on the lawn trimming some shrubs one day when he heard a coon on the other side of the fence say:

"Hi dere, yo' Pete, come ober here."

"Wha' yo' wan', niggah?" muttered Pete. "I'se busy, I is."

"Yas yo' am. De on'y time yo'm busy am when yo' eatin' yo' dinnah."

"Don' yo' talk back to me, sah, 'cause I won't stan' it."

"Yas yo' will, yo' gotter. Yo' am de lazies' coon in de hull town."

Pete straightened up, looked all around and saw no one but Dick sitting on a bench.

"Yo' heah dat niggah say dat, Mistah Richard?" he asked.

"Yes. Why don't you slug him?"

"'Cause he can't, dat's de reason. I lick him wif one han'."

"Juss yo' come out f'om ahin' dat wall an' do it den if yo' am so smaht."

"I don't hab to. Yo' come ober yer."

"Shell I go ober dere an' poun' him, Mistah Richard?" asked Pete. "Yo' don' s'pose yo' moder car', will she?"

"Huh, yo' can't poun', nuffin' yo' can't, yo' lazy, niggah. Come ober yer an' I knock yo' out putty sudden."

"Go on over and lick him, Pete," said Dick. "I wouldn't stand his lip."

Thus encouraged, Pete got up and walked towards the wall.

Just then he heard the merry notes of a banjo right on the other side of the fence.

"Plunk-a-plunk, plunketty-plunk, zim-zim, plunketty-plunk!"

"My wo'd! dat fellah kin play de banjo, he kin."

The sharp, clear cut notes of the banjo

"Why don't you get over and lick him, Pete?" asked Dick. "He's just under the wall, I guess."

"Reckon dey can't no willage nigger scare me," muttered Pete.

Then he got up on the wall and looked around.

He was about to jump down when he heard a sudden warning.

"Look out, niggah! Yo' jump on mah razor if yo' jump yer."

Pete was so rattled that he fell off the wall right into a lot of wild rose bushes full of thorns.

"Buzz-zip-buzz-zz!"

"Oh, fo' goodness sakes, de bushes am full ob ho'nets!" yelled the scared coon, as

he muttered as he picked himself up, "an' I mought's well go back to de ho'se."

He went back and was about to enter the gate when a voice suddenly exclaimed:

"Don' yo' come in, yer nigger, or I'll cut yo' fo' shuah."

That was too much for Pete, and he dusted around to the rear of the house while Dick amused himself by imitating the song of a mocking bird in a tree and driving all the real birds crazy with envy.

PART XXI.

HERE was plenty of fun for Dick those days but school would begin in a short time, and then there would be more yet, for Dick



Just then there was a shriek and a groan, and a lot of surprised exclamations. Two new arrivals had come upon the scene unknown to the two card players. They were two of the sisters of the Parson's congregation, come to pay a visit to Mrs. Richardson.

took all of Pete's attention, and as the player proceeded, he stopped, entranced.

The tune became more lively, and finally Pete could stand it no longer.

That banjo playing was too much for him, and he began to dance.

The way he shuffled and turned and shook his big feet was funny to see.

"Stop o' dat!" he cried. "Stop o' dat, I tol' yo'! Wha' bizness yo' got playin de banjo de like o' dat?"

The music stopped, and Pete heaved a sigh, straightened out his legs and went over to the wall.

He looked over it, but there was no one in sight.

"Well, why don't you lick him, Pete?" asked Dick.

The coon's eyes were as big as salt cellars.

"He ain' dere, Mistah Richard," he muttered, greatly surprised.

"Huh, yo'm blin' an' can't see me, dat's wha' de mattah wif yo'."

"Den yo'm hidin' behin' de bushes, an' yo'm a scared to come out."

"Ain' scared ob nuffin'! Yo'm scared yo'se'f."

he rolled down the bank into the dusty road.

The hornets were evidently after him still, for he could hear them buzzing all around him.

That boy Dick could imitate anything in the animal world from the buzzing of a bee or hornet, the singing of the festive mosquito, or the angry whirl of a mad wasp to the croaking of a sonorous bull frog, the braying of a musically inclined donkey, or the dullest warbling of a tom cat on the back fence.

Not only that, but he could imitate the whizz and buzz saw, the creak of a wagon wheel, the tramp of a horse over a stony road, or the sighing of the wind in the treetops, as well as the voice of any one he ever heard speak.

Pete was so sure that the hornets were after him that he ran at full speed down the road and did not stop till long after he was out of the sound of that scamp Dick's voice.

Finally he did stop, but only because he stubbed his toe against a stone and fell full length in the road.

"Reckon dem ho'nets go ober my head,"

would have all the more fellows to fool with his ventriloquism.

The Parson came back from his three days' vacation, and of course Dick had to include him in another snap, just as though the poor, good man had not had enough of them.

It chanced that Pete and Jonas were out in front of the house one warm afternoon, when there was really nothing to be done, and the piazza looked mighty cool and shady, with its easy chairs, hammocks and quiet nooks.

"Come here, boys," the Parson seemed to say from his study window.

Pete and Jonas came up, and at that moment the Parson stepped out upon the piazza.

He merely wanted to rest for a few moments, think up an idea or so and then go back to work.

The two men supposed he wanted to talk to them, of course, and they stood at a respectful distance, waiting to hear what he had to say.

The Parson scarcely saw them, he was so intent on his own thoughts.

He did not see Dick either, the latter

standing behind a rose bush not far distant.

Pete and Jonas waited patiently, and presently heard the Parson say:

"There isn't much to do to-day, boys, and you might as well amuse yourselves."

That was such a self-evident proposition that neither the coon nor the Yank thought it necessary to dispute or affirm it.

"Go get a deck of cards and play euchre or seven-up, or anything else you like. The fellow that wins the most games in ten will get a dollar."

That was a decidedly novel proposition to come from the Parson.

Pete and Jonas both looked at him in surprise.

Then the Parson turned and went into his study, seeming to say as he retreated:

"Go on, get the cards and play. What are you scared of?"

"Nuffin' tall, boss," chuckled Pete.

"Remember, a dollar to the man who gets the most games in ten."

"Wall, I reckon that dollar is mine fur sartin'."

"M—m! dish yer is a puddin', an' no mistake."

The Parson took his seat at his desk and resumed his writing.

"Yo' wait yer, Jo, an' I get de kyards," said Pete.

"All right, Pete. I'll wait, but don't ye stack 'em naow."

"Neber yo' feah, Jo, I play squar' ev'ry time, yo' bet."

Pete moped but presently returned with a clean, new pack of cards.

"Wha' yo' wan' ter play?" he asked, as he sat down and began to shuffle the pasteboards.

"Wull, I'm putty good on seven-up, I be."

"An' I'se a dandy at casiner, I is."

"S'pose we play euchre, then. Thet's as fair fur one as 'tis fur t'other."

Pete chuckled inwardly, and if he had said anything, it would have been:

"Euchrel Wall, yer is whar I got a reg'lar lead-pipe cinch on dat hayseed. Oh, my! ain' dis a puddin'!"

Jonas did not say anything, either, but his feelings took this turn:

"If'm, thet nigger thinks I can't play euchre. Wall, I'll jest show him if I can or no."

Pete began sorting out the cards, and asked:

"Yo' wan' de sebens an' eights kep' in, Jo?"

"Wall, no, I guess not. There's on'y tew on us. Nines an' tens is enough. Thet'll give us better hands."

"Does yo' wan' de joker, or jus' de reg'lar kyards?"

"Reckon we'll leave thet aout. It ain't accordin' ter Hoyle, yer know."

"Who am he?"

"Why, a feller what writ all abaout all kinds o' games o' cairds."

"An' he say de joker ain' none of de reg'lar kyards?"

"Yas."

"Den we leabe it out. I don't feel like buckin' up agin sich a pow'ful kyard as dat m'se f. A fellah gotter hab two bowahs an' a ace to do anything."

"Wall, yer got 'em shoveled?"

"Yas'r."

"Then cut fur deal. Highest deals in this, yer know."

Pete cut and got a knave.

"Thet on'y caunts fur a Jack in cuttin', yew know," said Jonas. "If I cut a queen I beat yer."

"A' right, go ahead wif de music."

Then Jonas cut and got another knave.

"Cut 'em agin," said Pete. "Dis time yo' go fus."

That time Jonas got a queen and Pete uncovered an ace.

Then the coon dealt, turned up an ace of spades and held the leftbower, queen and two other aces.

"Pass," said Jonas, who had a lot of diamonds.

Pete took it up and raked in a couple of points.

Then Jonas dealt, got two bowers and a nine and risked it.

Pete had the ten, queen and king and a couple of aces, and the Yank's two bowers were in the soup.

That made four points for the coon, and on the next hand he skinned out by just three tricks.

"Reckon dat dollah am mine fo' shuah," he chuckled to himself.

"I'll jest fule thet nigger an' make him think I don't know haow ter play," mused Jonas, "and then I'll git him rattled an' win the pot."

The second game was a little closer, Jonas getting three points while Pete secured five.

"Dar's two games fo' me an' one o' 'em a whitewash," said Pete. "Am dere any oder game yo' play bettah dan dis? I wan' to gib yo' a show fo' de money, yo' know."

"Never you mind me," said Jonas, dealing. "I've got a surprise party in store fur yer, I have."

Pete won the game, however, and Jonas concluded that he had better brace up if he wanted to win that dollar.

A run of good cards gave him that game and the next, however, and Pete won the sixth by only one point.

Jonas collared the next two and that made them even and the tug of war was close at hand.

It was Pete's deal and he had a fairly good hand, and one which would win provided he could get the lead.

Both players were excited and held their cards close to them so that the other might not guess what he had.

"Play tu thet!" cried Jonas, slapping down the best bower with a thump, as excited players always do.

"Dat's on'y one trick," sniffed Pete, as he chuckled on a small trump.

"Play tu thet, goldurn yu," cried Jonas, planking down the ace with a bang. "I'll skin yure trumps this time, yu bet."

Pete fetched down the left on that ace with a whack, and led an ace of another suit and color.

He took that, and then he led another ace.

Jonas savagely banged down a small card of the same suit, and Pete nearly split a board with the vim with which he put down his last and winning card.

Just then there was a shriek and a groan, and a lot of surprised exclamations.

Two new arrivals had come upon the scene unknown to the two card players.

They were two of the sisters of the Parson's congregation, come to pay a visit to Mrs. Richardson.

They were two of the worst cranks in the business.

Card playing, dancing, and all such amusements, whether indulged in rationally or otherwise, were, in their eyes, abominations leading straight to perdition.

The sight of those two fellows playing cards on the front piazza, and right under the Parson's eyes, as it were, was enough to horrify them.

"The idea, it's enough to freeze the blood in one's marrer," shrieked Sister Walker, with scant regard to anatomic truths.

"Playin' cards on the minister's stoop," screamed Sister Trotter, throwing up her hands.

"I wonder they hain't both been struck and killed dead."

"How can the Parson allow sech goin's on right out in broad daylight?"

"Just to think of it."

"It's puffedekly scandalous!"

Then Sisters Walker and Trotter both yelled and chuckled up their hands.

Pete and Jonas followed suit in the sudden surprise.

"Ain't you afraid of going straight to destruction, young man?"

"I wonder the airth hasn't opened and swallowed yer both, you sinful critters."

"Playin' cards right on the front piazza in sight of everybody. Oh! it's awful!"

"Don' fo'get dat I got dat game," said Pete. "Dat makes fibe fo' me."

"Oh-oh-oh! the depraved creature!" yelled Sister Trotter, with a face as long as a horse's.

"Thet's all right, missis," drawled Jonas. "Parson gave us leave ter play yere."

"Co'se he did," corroborated the coon, "an' tol' us he'd gib a dollah to de bes' playah, an' I'm gwine ter git dat dollah, yo' bet."

If the sea, fifty miles away, had at that moment rolled in upon and swamped them,

those two cranks could not have been more surprised.

They both let out a series of shrieks that were enough to split open all the graves within a mile.

"The Parson allow them to play cards! Horrible!"

"And giving a dollar to the best player! Awful!"

"He'll have to be spoke to at once."

"I won't go to his church another day!"

Then there came more shrieks and a lot of hysterics.

This time it aroused the Parson, who was not absolutely deaf, and he rushed out to see what was up.

It also alarmed Mrs. Richardson, and she ran out to see who was hurt.

Sadie also came upon the scene, impressed with the conviction that somebody was dead.

Dead people do not scream, as a rule, nor even as an exception, but then Sadie was apt to get mixed in her ideas occasionally.

The scene that met the eyes of the good couple was a novel one, to say the least.

There sat Jonas and Pete on the piazza, right in front of the Parson's study, surprise on their faces, cards scattered over the floor, and two horrified old hens murdering the quiet with their discordant yells.

"Why, Peter, Jonas, how could you?"

"What is the matter, my dear? Jonas, what are these pictures thrown about?"

"The idea of your permitting card playing, Mr. Richardson! I am shocked."

"To think that you would put a premium on gambling. It's outrageous."

The poor Parson was rattled, and didn't know what to make of all this fun. The good man scarcely knew what a pack of cards looked like, and to be accused of aiding and abetting gambling was something incomprehensible to him.

"You shouldn't play cards out here, Jonas," said Mrs. Richardson, mildly, when the two old guys gave her a chance to speak.

"De Pa'son said we could, m'am, 'cause dey was'n nuffin' ter do," explained Pete.

Pete carried the medal for truthfulness in that household and his reputation abroad was just as good, and Mrs. Richardson could not, therefore, discredit his statements.

"Yas'm, the Pa'son telled us tu git the cairds an' play right here," added Jonas.

That made things all the blacker for the Parson, and the two old fanatics groaned.

"I don't suppose the Parson meant real cards," said the poor man's wife, coming to her husband's rescue. "He probably meant 'Authors' or the 'Battle of Words' or something like that."

Pete was too much of a crank on truth-telling to let this explanation pass, however.

He wasn't one of the polite kind who declare that it is not always advisable to let the truth be known.

No, sir, he went in for the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, tararum, dominol!

"No, missus; he didn't; he said distinctly to git a deck an' play euchre or seben up, or anyting we liked, an' dat am jus' wha' he did say. Yo' know I neber tol' yo' a lie yit, missus."

The poor woman devoutly wished that he had done so once, just for the sake of diversity.

In fact he was too confoundedly truthful to suit the present emergency by all odds.

Sister Walker and Sister Trotter both groaned, and the latter raised her black-mitted hands and whined:

"Don't try to shield the sinner, Sister Richardson. It's yure duty to expose sin wherever yu find it, even in yure own haousehold. I sympathize with yu, sister, I deeply sympathize," as the walrus said when he ate the oysters, those of the largest size.

"Yes, and so du I," sniffled the other saint, while Dick gave Sadie the wink to clear cards and players off the scene. "I do indeed, Sister Rich'son. Let us —"

"Why, Sister Walker, how du? I thought yu was going ridin' with Sam Brown."

A voice from the road caused all hands to turn around.

A one-horse buggy was going by at that moment.

"There's old Ma'am Trotter, tew. She can't flirt with Deekin Potter to-day, 'cause his wife's ter hum."

The buggy drove on, and the two old girls turned as red as beets.

The occupant of the buggy was Squire Muddle, and he was known to be the biggest gossip in the county.

There was more truth than poetry in the intimations which he was supposed to have made and the two old frauds were terribly afraid that they might get around.

"Tra-la, old gals, don't try to mash the Parson while his wife's around."

This remark came floating back upon the

"You bet they won't say a word about pop's allowing card playing now. They're too much afraid their own little doings will come out."

Nothing did come of the affair in fact, and Sister Trotter and Sister Walker kept their lips buttoned.

It was a mishap that they had seen the game of cards, anyhow, for Dick had not dreamed of such a chance, the surprise being intended for his mother.

"You must really stop getting so absorbed in your work that you do not know what you are doing, Parson," said Mrs. Richardson, after the two cranks had gone. "Just think what a scandal might have been created."

oven and she was busy making more when the voice of a tramp was heard at the door.

"Got anything for a poor man to eat?"

"No, I haven't. Get out."

"Ah, go on, give us something, can't you?"

"I'll give you a scalding, that's what I'll give you," snarled Sadie, remembering the other tramp.

"No, you won't. Give us a bite o' bread and meat, that's a good girl."

"Don't you good girl me, you lazy loafer," and Sadie grabbed up the broom.

She rushed to the door, but there was no one in sight.



Then came another shower of apples, big and little, and the nag got the most of them. He took matters into his own hands, or rather feet, after that, and went down the road a kiting. The doctor held on to the reins and yelled, but all to no purpose.

wind, for Dick could imitate distant voices as well as those close at hand.

"What did you say?" asked the Parson, now that a sudden quiet fell upon the scene.

"Oh, I dare say the Parson didn't know anything about it!" Sister Trotter hastened to explain, "but I don't think you ought to allow the men to come in front."

"It was all a mistake, of course," added the other old girl. "We've had a delightful call. Do come and see us, Mrs. Richardson, and do bring that nice boy of yours. He's a real model boy; he is, such a good example to the others."

"Yes, he's just the nicest boy in town, do come and see me, all of you, we've had such a pleasant call, you do make it so agreeable, good morning, such a lovely time."

"Get out, you old humbugs! I'm on to you both!"

The old jays were bowing and smirking and telling all manner of society lies, making as graceful a retreat as possible when this remark, apparently from the Parson, broke them all up.

They dusted out in short order, and Dick chuckled softly to himself as he retired:

"Why, what have I done now, my dear?" asked the Parson, greatly surprised.

"Allowing Peter and Jonas to play cards on the piazza and offering a dollar to the winner. It's unexplainable."

It didn't do the Parson any good to disclaim all-knowledge of the affair.

"They would not have dared to play without permission," affirmed his wife.

This, as well as other things, was set down to the Parson's absent-mindedness and no more was said about it.

"Dear me, I don't know what I am going to do if he keeps on," sighed Mrs. Richardson. "He gets worse and worse."

Dick did not happen to hear this remark or he would have explained matters and have given the Parson a rest.

That boy Dick was not bad but he sometimes forgot and ran one subject rather more than he ought to have done.

He knew that his father's reputation was safe enough, for he had put a flea in the ears of those two old girls which would keep them from giving anything away.

The next morning he thought it was about time to give Sadie another little racket.

The hired girl had some things in the

"You'd better go," she sneered, "if you know what's good for you."

"Come on, Sadie, give us something, won't you?"

This time the voice came in at the window instead of the door.

"No, I won't. Get out."

"Ah, go on, pass it out here!"

What Sadie did pass out was a dipper of hot water which she let fly in another minute.

"Ki-yi, ki-yi, ki-yi!"

"Oh, goodness, I've scalded the dog instead of the tramp!" gasped Sadie, rushing to the window and looking out.

She saw neither tramp, nor dog, nor other living creature.

"Well, if that don't beat all."

An odor from the oven warned her that her cake was getting all the baking it needed.

She chucked open the door and grabbed up a damp dishcloth.

"Whew! it's awful hot in here. How would you like it yourself?"

It was a squeaky voice which asked this question and it came from the oven.

Sadie stared at the well browned cake and couldn't stir.

"Now, then, slowcoach, are you never going to take me out?"

Sadie's eyes nearly popped out of her head with astonishment.

"For mercy's sake! The cake is talkng!" she gasped.

"You bet I'm talking. Get me out of this, you donkey. Do you think I want to be burned all up?"

That scared girl let out one yell, equal to six and fainted on the floor.

When she revived she saw the cake setting on the table.

"Well, I never!" she muttered, as she opened the oven door and saw a fresh cake inside.

"How in time did that cake get on the table?"

"Walked there, you jay. You don't suppose I was going to be burned up, do you?"

"I'm bewitched, that's what I am," shrieked Sadie, jumping up.

She dusted out of that kitchen in a jiffy, and ran right into the arms of the hired man.

"Hallo, what yer 'baout, who be yer huggin' anyhaow?" drawled Jonas.

"The cakes and things have been talkin' to me," gasped Sadie, "and I'm scared to go into the kitchen again."

"Cakes talkin' tu yu, hey? Wall, yu take the cake, yu du! What yu been drinkin'? Some o' thet hard cider daown cellar?"

This imputation was too much for Sadie.

She forgot her fright, forgot all her old superstitions.

She hauled off with her big red right hand and gave that rash hired man a stinger on the cheek with her open palm which loosened two of his teeth.

"Ouch! Stop o' that!" he bawled.

"Then don't you say I drink hard cider, nor nothing else," answered Sadie, with blood in her eye, as she went back to the kitchen.

The cake did not say anything else, and Sadie clapped it into the pantry mighty sudden, for fear that it would.

"Reckon it was only Jonas talking, anyhow," she mused, "and I thought it was the cake. Schucks! he did it just to fool me, but I fixed him all right and he won't bother me no more."

PART XXII.

THE summer was over and the autumn had set in, and with it the approaching school term, but there were still several days in which Dick could roam about and enjoy himself as much as he pleased.

He was down in the village one day when he met Wing Sing, the only Chinaman in town and the proprietor of a paying laundry establishment.

Wing had a big basket on his arm and was arrayed in clean white blouse and baggy trousers, felt shoes and straw hat, and looked as neat as wax.

"Hallo Wing! how goes it?" asked Dick, with a bland smile.

Dick had played a racket on Wing once, and although the Celestial did not know for sure that Dick was to blame, he suspected him all the same.

"No speakee at Melican bloy," said the suspicious Mongolian. "Whatee wantee by Wingee? You wantee washee shirtee, collee, cuffee?"

"Where are you going with the rats, Wing?" asked Dick.

"Me no gottee rattee. You givee me flunny bizzee, hap."

"Squeak, squeak!"

"Oh, I do, eh? What's that noise?"

"Squeak, squeak!"

"Me no gottee rattee, rattee in holee so be," chattered the Chinaman looking all around.

"Yes, they are in a hole in your basket, that's where they are."

"Squeak, squeak!"

The squealing was louder now and came directly from Wing's basket.

"Hi-yal how rattee gettee in baskee? Me no puttee."

"Squeak, squeak, squeak!"

It sounded as if there were a dozen rats, big and little in the basket.

You could hear them rushing about

among the clean clothes, rattling the paper which covered the latter and making no end of a fuss.

"Look out, or you'll lose your dinner, Wing," said Dick.

"Nopee, me no eatee rattee, me eatee bleaf steakee allee same Melican, me go Slunday school, me goodee fellee, me no eatee rattee, me eatee chickee," squealed the distracted heathen.

"Squeak, squeak, squeak!"

The noise was something terrible, and Wing set his basket down on the board walk in great alarm.

"Get your gun, John!" laughed Dick.

"You don't want to lose those rats."

"Me no wantee rattee, me no likee," chattered Wing, yanking the paper off of the basket.

"Me punchee fellee headee what puttee rattee in baskee."

Out came shirts, collars, cuffs, white vests, under-clothes, handkerchiefs, and everything else, and still the squeaking continued.

Finally everything was out, and not a rat was to be seen.

"Where be?" asked Wing, with a blank look on his by no means expressive countenance.

"Got away," said Dick. "Maybe you'll find them in your—"

"Squeak, squeak!"

The sound came from Wing's baggy breeches.

"There they go, up your trouser legs!" cried Dick. "You can't shake 'em!"

"Squeak, squeak!"

Wing jumped up in a hurry and began to dance and caper about in the wildest fashion.

"Takee off, me no likee, rattee bittee, takee loff!" he yelled in a high key, as he skipped and hopped around.

Dick got to laughing so much that he could not get in any more of his ventriloquial tricks and a crowd gathered.

"What's the matter, Wing?"

"The Chinaman's got a fit."

"Turn the hose on him."

"Nopee, no squirttee watee, rattee gottee in tlousee, me gettee out."

Then that rattled Chinaman yanked off his blouse and breeches, and stood before the gang in red unmentionables, which, being skin tight made him look as if he had been skinned.

"I'll kill the durned rats, yu bet," said a big countryman with muddy boots, and he executed a war dance on Wing's clean suit with disastrous results.

Not a rat was found nor heard after that, for Dick slipped away to work a little snap on some one else.

Then the mob accused the Chinaman of having sold them, and they began to make it torrid for him.

They punched, and slugged, and knocked him about till he was finally forced to slam his wash pell-mell into his basket, grab his soiled clothes and dashed down the street like a streak of red lightning, and escaping by running into his own shop and barring the doors and windows.

About the last racket of Dick's, which I am going to tell about, happened a few days before the opening of school.

It was early in the autumn, and the apples on one of the trees around on the side of the house were getting ripe and were beginning to fall.

The Parson's wife thought it would be a good thing to pick them before the boys in the neighborhood got on to the fact of their being ripe and did the job for her.

One afternoon, therefore, she put Jonas and Pete to work picking them, while Sadie sorted out the different sizes in baskets.

Dick was around of course, but he wasn't doing very much work, it being enough for him to boss the others.

The Parson was up-stairs at work in the end room facing the road, which at this point ran quite close to the house.

Something was being done to the study, papering, painting, carpeting, or the inevitable Friday upsetting, it doesn't matter which, and the Parson had been banished to the floor above.

Presently, when Pete and Jonas both happened to be on the ground, having just come down with heaping baskets, a crazy looking one-horse buggy was seen coming along the road.

It belonged to the village doctor, a regular old crusty crank whom no one could get along with.

Just then the Parson's voice was heard from the floor above.

"I say, Pete, Sadie, Jonas, Dick, everybody, here comes Dr. Pillion. He likes a joke, let's give him one."

It was news to Jonas that the doctor liked a joke, but he wouldn't dispute the Parson, of course.

"Pick out as many small apples as you can find, everybody, Sadie, Pete, Jonas, all the gang."

"Here's a whole basketful of 'em, sir," said Sadie.

"That's good. Fill your arms full and when the Doc gets opposite, let drive at him."

"Wull, ob all tings!" muttered Pete.

"Shut up, you black nightingale, and do as I tell you."

"Yas, boss, 'nuff said."

"But he won't like it, will he?" asked Sadie, looking up.

"Yes, he will, you misfit fairy, he'll think it's awful funny."

Jonas and Pete were ready enough to carry out the snap, even if it was a little out of the common, but Sadie demurred.

"Where's Mr. Richard?" she asked.

"We'd better ask him about it."

Dick was not in sight, however, having skipped around the corner of the barn.

"Go on, I tell you. It's all right. The Doc will think it's the funniest thing out."

Sadie's scruples were overcome, and she filled her arms with ammunition from the basket and awaited the coming of Dr. Pillion.

He was almost to the house, his old plug going along at an easy gait, and not hurrying himself worth mentioning.

The three fusiliers stood on the piazza, waiting for the Doc to come alongside.

Pretty soon the Parson's voice was heard.

"Now then, all together, let him have it!"

Whizz!

Bing!

Zip!

Thump!

The air was full of flying apples.

They hit the horse, they rattled against the buggy, they flew all around.

The Doctor had his high hat knocked off, his spectacles went flying, and he was bombarded generally.

The old nag got it in the ribs, on the nose, on the flank, and in the legs, and some of the apples rattled against his blinders.

They struck the top of the buggy, and rolled on the floor; they caroused against the body, and made a terrible racket; they hit the shafts, and bounced and jumped in the craziest fashion.

The nag was not a bit used to this sort of business, and bolted.

"Whoa! you Turk!" yelled the doctor.

"Give it to him, boys; let him have it!"

Then came another shower of apples, big and little, and the nag got the most of them.

He took matters into his own hands, or rather, feet, after that, and went down the road a kiting.

The doctor held on to the reins and yelled, but all to no purpose.

He got a terrible bumping and tossing up, and every bone ached.

Now he was on the seat, now across the dashboard, now on the floor, but he held on to the reins, all the same, and yelled like blazes.

Apples hopped from the seat to the floor, and rolled in the dust, and you could trace the doctor's course by them.

The old plug, smarting from the cracks he had got and expecting more, hoofed it down the road in lively style.

The old fellow hung on to the reins and yelled, and finally, after a dash of half a mile, managed to rein in his reeking steed.

He was mad, and no mistake, and the air was blue with the remarks he made, for, although he was a member of the Parson's church, he was by no means particular in regard to his language when excited.

"The white-headed old fool!" he sputtered. "How dare he order his servants to pelt me with apples, blow him! I'll have the law on him, I'll split him in two, I'll

get him fired out of the church, I'll—I'll—I'll—oh-oh!"

That was not exactly how he wound up his speech, but it'll have to go that way.

He finished up his calls and then he went back, boiling over with wrath.

When he got to the house, the Parson was standing on the piazza looking at the men picking up apples.

"Oh, you're there, are you?" he yelled. "What do you mean by it, you white-headed old sinner!"

"Don't pelt him this time, boys. Let's hear how he liked the joke."

"The joke!" thundered Dr. Pillion, turning purple with rage. "The joke, you old idiot! How dare you call it a joke?"

"What do you say, doctor?" asked the Parson. "Lovely weather, isn't it?"

"You go to thunder with your lovely weather!" stormed the doctor, getting out of the buggy and coming to the fence. "I want to know what you mean by having me pelted with apples. I'll have the law on you. I'll have you declared a lunatic. I'll smash your ugly face for you."

"Really, sir, I don't understand what you mean," said the puzzled Parson, at his wit's end to know what all the fuss was about.

"Oh, you don't, eh? Now you're trying to lie out of it, like a sneak. I'll have the law on you, I will. I might have broken my neck, just for your freshness."

"But, positively, Dr. Pillion, I do not understand you," said the Parson.

"You don't?" howled the other.

"No."

"Do you mean to tell me that you didn't order the two men and the woman to pelt me with apples when I went up the road just now?"

The Parson looked the surprise he felt at this question.

"I certainly did not," he answered, positively.

Then that truth-telling coon had to say something.

He was a great deal of a nuisance, he was, with his propensity for strict veracity at all times and under all circumstances.

"Oh, yes, yo' did, Pa'son!" he ejaculated. "Yo' done tol' me an' Jo' an' Sadie to pelt de doctah all we could."

"Shut up, you lying coon."

"Deed I isn' lyin', Pa'son," protested Pete. "Yo' done tol' us fo' shuah to do dat."

"Of course you did," snorted the irate physician. "Guess I heard you, plain enough."

"Yes, Pa'son, that's what yo' telled us," drawled Jonas. "Yo' sayed the dawktor enjoyed a joke and fur us not ter mind."

"There!" cried Pillion. "There's another. Now deny it, if you can."

"But I do deny it," said the Parson. "I never gave such orders I never saw you go up the road; dear me, dear me, I never saw such stupid servants!"

The Parson's wife, hearing the racket, came out to see what it was all about.

"Good afternoon, doctor," she said, pleasantly. "What is the matter? You seem excited."

"I guess you'd be excited," snarled the old curmudgeon, "if you had a man pelt you with apples, nearly break your neck, scare your horse into a fit, smash your carriage and then deny it all, like the Parson. You want to have him looked after, ma'm, for it's my belief he's as crazy as a loon."

Mrs. Richardson became suddenly alarmed.

She had thought the same thing before, but had not dared to say it.

"You had better go in, my dear," she said to the Parson. "I will talk to the doctor myself. Peter, Sadie, Jonas, you need not remain."

"I don't understand a word of it and I hope you will," said the poor man, with a sigh. "Things are getting worse and worse here and I can't make it out. I never have any peace unless I go away from home."

Then he went into the house, and his wife said to Pillion:

"Doctor, you have suggested a thing which has long troubled me. I really fear that the Parson is going insane, and I am afraid something will have to be done about it."

"Very well; have an examination," said Pillion. "You can easily tell if he is insane or not."

"I think that it will have to be done, and if you will consult with some one about it and set a time, I will be greatly obliged."

Dick did not hear this, having skipped when his mother sent away Pete and the others. The next day Pillion and two other old fossils came to the house and held a long confab.

They asked the Parson a lot of questions, talked about the queer things he was alleged to have done, and at last came to the conclusion that he was insane and must be committed to an asylum.

Dick was not around when they came, but upon his return he saw three gigs standing at the gate, and wondered what was up.

"What's the matter, Pete?" he asked of the coon, who crossed the lawn at that moment. "Conference of ministers?"

"No, Mistah Richard, it ain't ministahs, it am doctahs."

"What's the matter?" asked Dick, quickly. "Who is sick?"

"Ain' anybody sick, but de doctahs is 'samimin' yo' pa, an' dey say he gotter be put in de 'sylum."

Dick's face turned red and pale by turns.

"Not if I know it, he won't," he muttered, and he made a bee line for the front door.

He dashed into the parlor where the three old humbugs were sitting, and said:

"You're a lot of jays, the whole of you! Who says that my father's insane?"

"There isn't any doubt about it," answered Pillion. "See how he behaved yesterday, and see how he's been behaving on other occasions, telling the men to play cards on the piazza, ordering the cook to put coal on the table, telling her to come and kiss him, and a dozen other things, any one of which would stamp him as a fit subject for an insane asylum."

"That's where you're off your route, the whole of you," said Dick. "He is no more insane than I am or any of you. You are mistaken, that's all."

"Young man," said Pillion, "you must not attempt to interfere with persons older and wiser than yourself. We have adjudged your father insane, and he must be sent to an asylum."

"Yes, he will—not."

It was the Parson's voice, and every one looked surprised.

"Don't excite yourself, my dear," said his wife.

"Why, I haven't said anything," declared the Parson.

"Of course he hasn't," said Dick. "It was I who spoke. Now just watch me for a moment."

The young fellow opened the piano.

"There isn't anything in there, is there?" he asked.

"No," said all.

"Well, now what?" and he closed the instrument.

In a second you would have thought that forty-cats were fighting inside the piano, and raising no end of a racket.

Dick raised the cover and the sound increased in intensity.

"Now, watch again," and he put back the lid and walked away from the instrument.

In a jiffy you could hear it playing, now soft, now loud, now a jig, and then a march and yet not a key moved.

"You see Pete out there on the lawn, do you?" asked Dick.

"Yes."

Dick closed the window and in a moment a step was heard in the hall outside.

There was the sound of the turning of a knob, the click of the latch, the closing of a door, and then:

"Goo-mo'nin', Pa'son, goo-mo'nin', Mis Rich'son. I reckon I don' spoke to no sech slob as dem fellahs."

The door had not opened, no one had entered, there was Pete still on the lawn, and yet he was talking to them in the room.

"Hallo, Dick! let me out of this 'ere closet. I'm a smotherin', b'gosh."

"Where are you, Jonas?" asked Dick, facing the company.

"In the closet, I tell yu. Can't yu hear nothin' at all?"

"What in the name of goodness is the man doing in the closet?" muttered Dick's mother.

Dick opened the closet door while the supposed Jonas was reiterating his demand to be let out.

There was the sound of a man's voice behind a door, and then in the same room, but there wasn't any Jonas, there being only about six inches of standing room behind the closet door.

Everybody looked at everybody else in surprise.

"Where is he?"

"I do believe somebody's crazy."

"Well, Parson, I think I'm a big chump."

"What do you say, doctor?" asked the Parson, turning to Pillion.

"I did not say anything."

"Why, yes, you did."

This time it was the Parson's wife who spoke.

Rap-rap!

There was a double rap on the door.

"Come in, you fool," one of the doctors seemed to say.

Dick opened the door, but there was no one to be seen.

Then you could hear a scream, and the sound of somebody rolling down stairs, also a splash and a crash.

"Dere, I done spill all de watah, an' broke de pitcher."

All hands ran into the hall to see if Pete were hurt, but there was no Pete there.

"I can fool you in a thousand ways," said Dick. "I made all those noises."

"But you haven't said a word," declared Mrs. Richardson.

Dick then faced the company, and imitated barking dogs, mewing cats, and the songs of a dozen different birds, as well as the voices of everyone in the room, and no one could detect the slightest movement of his facial muscles.

"There, that'll do for one exhibition," he said, at length. "This is ventriloquism, my friends, and I have been selling everybody around here for the last six months, and no one has tumbled. I wouldn't give it away now, only that Pop is likely to get into trouble."

"Ventriloquism!" murmured the Parson. "To be sure, many strange things can be done by its aid. Well, well, I always said that that boy was not as innocent as he looked."

Mrs. Richardson said nothing, probably because it would have taken her too long to do the subject justice.

"Yes, I know, Ma," laughed Dick, "that I am the innocent one of the family, but I'm the fellow that has worked off all these tricks. Gentlemen," to the three medical experts, "I don't think we want you any longer."

The three chumps went away in disgust and Mrs. Richardson breathed a sigh of relief.

"Well, I'm glad your father is not insane, Dick," she said, "but I can plainly see that we will all be so if you stay around here. You must go to school."

"Oh, I expect to," said Dick, imitating the buzzing of a bee just under his mother's nose, and that causing the worthy lady to jump and make a wild pass at nothing.

"Yes, of course you are going to school," she remarked, when she realized that she had been sold, "but not here. You would drive us all crazy in six months. No wonder your father complained of the servants, no wonder I marveled at his strange acts. No, my boy, this is no place for a ventriloquist, and particularly such a good one. You must go to boarding-school next week."

He went, too, for all hands agreed that they would have far more peace and comfort with him out of the house than in it.

Dick did not mind, for he would have a larger field for the exercise of his powers than he would at home or in the village.

He was sent away to school the very next week, and peace and quietness reigned once more in the Parsonage, and, although all hands liked our Dick, they were not sorry for a time to be rid of so dangerous and perplexing a companion as a natural born ventriloquist.

[THE END.]

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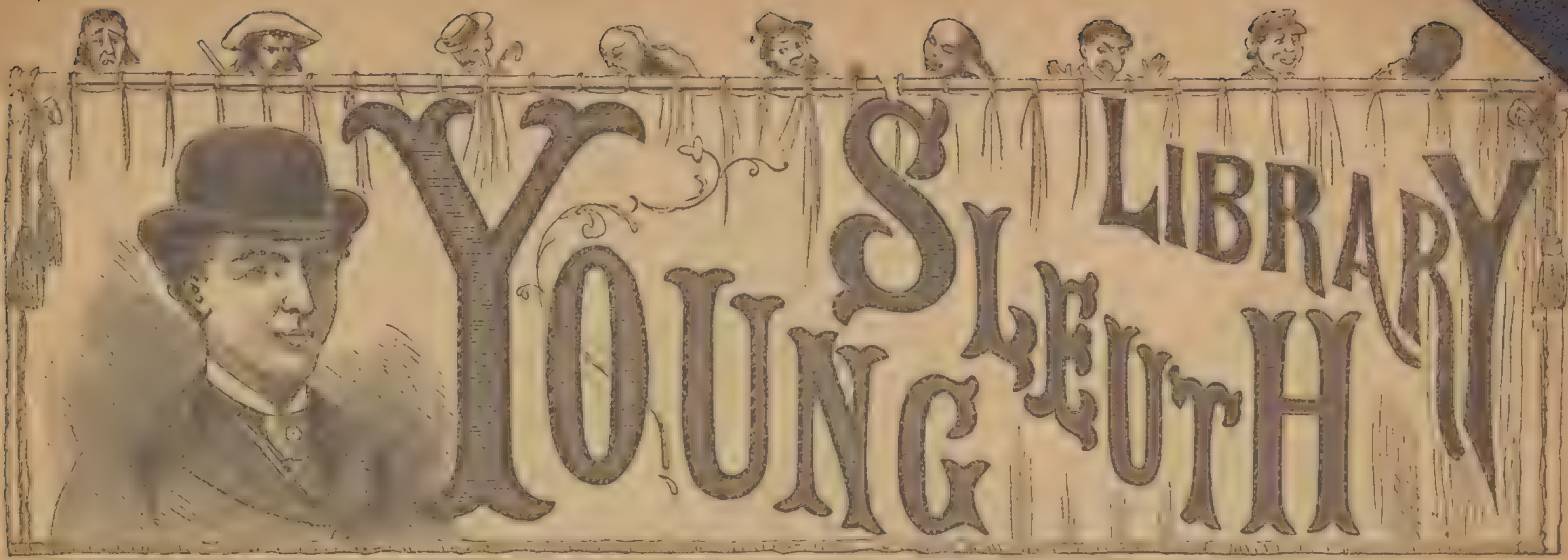
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